The Bible in English Literature

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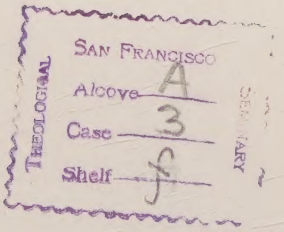
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The Bible in English Literature

The Bible in English Literature

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By

EDGAR WHITAKER WORK, D.D.

Author of "The Fascination of the Book," "The House of Chimham," "The Folly of the Three Wise Men," etc.

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Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

To
the dear memory
of
John Stewart Work
'A Golden Lad' whom God needed

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FOREWORD

THIS volume is a tribute of the heart to the well-loved Book. Nor is the author ashamed to be found in possession of the hope that it may help to enrich the love of other hearts for the same sacred Book. Surely it will not be thought unduly ambitious to believe that the last word has not been said about the influence of the Bible. Indeed the last word never can be said. An editorial writer in one of our best magazines spoke the other day of the music of the Bible—"The ear of our mind is listening for a rhythm more subtle than that of accent or measured feet." That was finely said—yet there will be other pens in other days that will write even finer things than this. The theme does not come to an end. It runs on like a brook—forever. Just because men's lives are always unfolding, changing, growing, there is always something new about the way the Book of Life touches human souls. To-day does not exhaust it: to-morrow its touch shall be something stronger than before. Imaginative minds have ever dreamed of a treasure that gave forth "things new and old." The Master did but put this dream of the heart in words when he spoke of the resourceful householder. After him came other householders like Browning with—

"My star that dartles the red and the blue"—

and many others in the generations who have looked

for the new and the old. Is not all this hunger of the soul for fruit that is sufficient for all the changing scenes and ways of life come true in the Word? Not yet has any desert of life been found that could stop the flowing of the Fountain.

It gratifies some of us to think of the Temple of Theology just as the Temple of Life, and to feel when we take this Book in hand that it is speaking down deep into life, and bidding deep answer unto deep in echoes that live on through the years. And this is why the Bible has left so great a mark upon our literature. When men write in the most real of ways, they bare their souls unto God's winds of grace and power. His touch of destiny is upon them. It is the naked soul of humanity that one sees in the most vital areas of our literature, and it is there—upon the sensitiveness of men's emotions, consciences, imaginations, aspirations—that the Bible has left the imprint of its power.

The subject is not casual—it is nothing incidental, nor even wholly explicit. It is implicit in the profoundest sense—it is close to the beating of the heart, and the flowing of the blood. For we believe that English-speaking people possess the Bible in this way, not merely in outward ways and customs, but in the blood. The author can only hope that he has succeeded to some extent in making this clear as respects English literature.

A portion of the material of these chapters has been used from time to time in lectures before institutions and popular assemblies. The plan of this book has required careful recasting, and great enlargement of the material. Many pages of course could have been

filled with quotations from writers in prose and poetry who have drawn upon the Bible. The author has purposely resisted the multitude of quotations. In the case of the poets, however, it seemed wise to quote more freely.

E. W. W.

New York.

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I

INTRODUCTION

"My masters, there's an Old Book you should con."

THE remark of James Anthony Froude that "the Bible is in and of itself a liberal education," may seem to some a mere extravagance of a not over-careful historian. But to the student of English literature the remark will seem at once a just estimate of a historic fact. As he progresses with his study, and finds himself always confronting in his own mind the inquiry as to the sources of spiritual vision and power in our literature, he will return again and again to the historian's judgment with a growing sense of its interpretative insight.

Literature cannot flourish without religion. Stopford A. Brooke in a thoughtful essay writes—"The first thing we want for the sake of a great literature and a great poetry is a noble religion which will bear by its immaterial truths our intellect, conscience, emotions, imagination, and spirit, beyond this world; and yet, by those very truths, set us into the keenest activity in the world for the bettering of the world, making every work, and above all, literature, full of a spiritual and a social passion, weighty and dignified by spiritual and social thought."[1]

From the beginning Christianity has promoted literature. Throughout the centuries the Christian faith has been possessed of a certain "genius" that

[1] *Religion in Literature and Religion in Life*, p. 30.

has proved a powerful mental stimulant. It has stirred human minds to unwonted activity, it has crowded human thought with fresh ideals and hopes, it has filled human imagination with visions so vast and far-reaching that the very act of cherishing these visions has enlarged the kingdom of the mind. No subject so profoundly moves the mind as religion. Literature is its natural product. The New Testament itself was the product, natural and irresistible, of the most momentous religious movement known among men.

It is proposed in these pages to examine the effect of the Christian mode of thought and life, as embodied in a Book, upon the making and shaping of English literature. Given the Bible as the vehicle of the Christian religion, and the chief instrument of its progress, our task is to inquire after the influence of the Bible in that area of human thought where English-speaking peoples have recorded their judgments and feelings concerning life. It must be remembered that "the making of many books" is not of necessity the creation of a literature. Literature is the kind of writing that frames noble and useful thought in forms that excel. Such writing links itself invariably with religious feeling. The influence of the Bible in English literature is thus a noteworthy fact in human annals. Our theme is not the Bible *as* English literature, but the Bible *in* English literature.[2] We shall see as we proceed how the Bible has colored the thought

[2] Cf. *The Bible as English Literature,* by J. H. Gardiner, Assistant Professor of English in Harvard University; also *Literary Study of the Bible,* by Richard G. Moulton, and *The Bible as Literature,* by Professor Moulton and others.

of English-speaking people, and especially how it has affected the making of that great body of literature that is the just pride of all who speak the English tongue.

The subject is beset by difficulties. We shall often find ourselves in the presence of facts that elude us, and we shall often be aware of delicate atmospheric effects that refuse to be reduced to measured formula or statement. Many outstanding facts, however, will enlist our attention; nor shall we despair of hinting at least at some of the obscurer and more intricate influences, which, though less certain, may be all the more profound. We shall not be content with showing how the Bible has been quoted by English writers. This is important, and will receive frequent attention. The purpose is broader than this—to show how Biblical thought and style have entered into the very mold of English literature.

The subject should have apologetic value. We shall be but extending our knowledge of the vitality of the Book, and strengthening our conviction of its permanent worth for human thinking and living. The lack of such study has wrought injury on two sides. On the one side is the phenomenon of a large number of educated persons, who are not really capable of comprehending our noble English literature in a spiritual way, through their deplorable ignorance of its richest sources in the English Bible.[3] On the other side is the phenomenon of a group of persons, trained in the Bible and Theology, who nevertheless lack in

[3] "Without the Bible it is impossible to understand the literature of the English language from Chaucer to Browning." Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University.

certain vivid conceptions of the power of the Book, because they have never taken pains to follow it intimately into those wide ranges of human experience represented by literature.

Nothing can be closer to the life, to the very pulsations of the life of a people, than literature. To the extent that we shall be able to see the effect of the Bible upon literature, we shall also discover, from a fresh point of view, its profound relation to life. We shall see, with new emphasis of fact, how productive this Book is of vital thinking, how it tends to produce an upward drift of the mind, how it cleanses and broadens the mental vision, how it furnishes types and norms of thought as well as formulæ of expression, how it creates profound and moving passions of the soul, how, in short, it is to English-speaking people not merely a "pure well of English undefiled," but also the one *popular* Book of English history, entering constantly into the thought and feeling of the people, and being crystallized in scores of ways in their literature.

For the average reader, and still more for the student, the practical results to be expected from the pursuit of such lines of study as are suggested in this volume may be briefly indicated.

First: The pursuit of such studies as these may be expected to strengthen our appreciation of the commanding influence of the Bible among men.

Second: Another result will be to enlarge our understanding of the Bible itself, especially of those qualities of the Bible that make it the Book of the people, and of those abundant materials that are so easily imported by a thousand ways of adaptation into the feelings and thoughts of the people.

Third: Such studies should tend therefore to increased facility upon the part of those who are called to "handle the Word," by exposing the power of the Book on the side of its variety of experience, its diversity of speech and form, and its broad comprehensiveness and adaptation to life.

Fourth: There should follow thus a very just emphasis of the value of good literature as a medium of approach to men. By this we do not mean the mere art of quotation. Rather we mean to suggest that there is in literature a universal language which men understand, and a power of prerogative which gives it mighty sway in the minds of men. To be familiar with this quality in literature, and to be able to identify its major influences with the primary forces set free in the mind by the Book of books, is to discover an open pathway to the human heart.

Fifth: Even a casual inquirer in this field of investigation must come to realize more clearly than before the permanent and powerful place of religion in human experience.

The importance of our theme is much enhanced by the fact that the inquiry occupies a very intensive area of history. English literature has proved itself a majestic instrument. Covering as it does a period of full twelve hundred years, its sweep has been from the beginning outward into the fields of power. Lacking the dramatic strength of the Greek literature, lacking also the vigorous setting of a stupendous and spectacular history such as the Latin literature enjoys, it has nevertheless a magnificent background of narrative, a high atmospheric color of national genius, a rare flexibility and grace of adaptation, and withal a moral

receptiveness that echoes the longings of the soul, and creates a permanent undertone of spiritual feeling.

Now we are inquiring—What has been the influence of the Bible in this intensive and constructive period of history, particularly in the growth of such a remarkable human instrument as the body of English literature has proved to be?

It is not strange that the capacity of English literature for spiritual life and expression has led many students to believe in the "special providence" of history. If the literature of the English-speaking people had been in any degree less ready to reflect the soul's light, or less flexible in the hands of reverent men, the world would have suffered a pathetic loss. On the contrary, throughout the millennium and more of its active influence in human affairs, English literature has been a profound factor in the spiritual progress of the race. It has caught up and given permanence to flitting ideals; it has registered the hopes and longings of the generations in the things of the soul; it has set its standards constantly in advance of the people, and called them forward in their thinking.

There are two other factors that deserve consideration. One of these is the constitution of the English mind, and another is the strange shaping of affairs in the making of the English people.

"The more I reflect," writes Taine in a famous passage, "on the conformation of the English mind, and on the preëminence of the moral being, and the necessity for regarding nature through the eyes of the moral being, from first to last, the more clearly do I arrive at an understanding of the strong and innu-

merable roots of that serious poem which is here called religion."

What will such a people do with such a Book? It is a case for interesting spiritual prognostic, and chastened imagination. For more than a thousand years, since the very time indeed when this people began to write down their thoughts and experiences, they have been marked amongst the nations as "a people of a Book." Almost their entire recorded history has been enacted in the presence of the Bible, whilst some of the most important events of their annals, like the making of the English Versions, have grown out of their connection with the Book. Many indeed of the picturesque elements of English history, and much of that elemental spiritual romance of the annals of this people, are due to the presence in their midst of one Book.

Let the reader consider the bent of the English mind, the Puritan "conversance with deep things," the roots of which are discernible quite early, the formative idealism, the profound and seemingly fundamental conviction of the supernatural, the native craving for spiritual satisfaction, the marked openness of mind to spiritual impression, and he will realize that much is to be expected of such a people, thus deeply impressed with the meaning of "that serious poem called religion"—with such a book as the Bible in their possession.

In like manner no one can read the story of the making of the English people without being aware of an impressive shaping of events. The subject appeals strongly to the historical imagination. We must try to picture to ourselves in aid of our theme that re-

markable blending of races that began in the fifth century and continued to the eleventh century and even beyond, producing in the new English people a splendid composite of Teutonic strength and seriousness along with vast rudeness, of Celtic fervor and imagination, and of Norman romance and lightness. From this remarkable amalgamation there came forth a new national product, a people of large capacity for life and service, tinged from the beginning with moral earnestness, and gifted also with an interpretative genius, that is ready at all times to burst on the one hand into sober prose and solemn tragedy, or on the other hand into lyric song and romantic imagery. "It is not without significance," writes the historian Green, in an effort to account for the genius of William Shakespeare, "that the highest type of the race, the one Englishman who has combined in the largest measure the mobility and fancy of the Celt, with the depth and energy of the Teutonic temper, was born on the old Welsh and English border-land, in the forest of Arden."[4]

We must try also to reproduce to our imagination the strange confusion of tongues that grew out of the blending of races, the formation of that sturdy instrument of human expression, the Anglo-Saxon, and the final survival, through a period of heroic struggle, of the English language, modified and enriched by Norman additions. When the process of language formation is at length completed, it is apparent to the student, who has watched the process as in a chemist's glass in the laboratory, that the English people are in

[4] Quoted in the Encyclopedia Britannica, ninth edition, in an article on Shakespeare, by Prof. T. Spencer Baynes.

possession of a language which reflects in ruggedness, color, and earnestness of tone the spiritual aspirations of this new and strong race. "That wonderful composite called English, the best result of the confusion of tongues," is the characteristic description of James Russell Lowell. "The English-speaking nations," he adds, "should build a monument to the misguided enthusiasts of the Plain of Shinar; for, as the mixture of many bloods seems to have made them the most vigorous of modern races, so has the mingling of divers speeches given them a language which is perhaps the noblest vehicle of poetic thought that ever existed."[5]

The far-away beginnings of English literature, when as yet the English were a heathen people, reveal the serious background of their thought. Their imagination was early busied with a dimly-perceived spiritual world, and they dealt earnestly, however crudely, with the deep questions that arise in the human mind. They produced a body of myth and song that represents with pathetic emphasis their inherent earnestness. The student lingers with a fascination that runs in the blood over the scanty and imperfect lines of "Widsith," or "The Far Wanderer," which are believed to be the earliest specimens of Anglo-Saxon verse that have come down to us. Among many minor poems of that early day there is one that has rightful prominence. This is "Beowulf," a poem of three thousand lines. The theme of this rugged composition is conflict—conflict with the powers of evil. It contains many sentiments that indicate the beginnings of fine feeling.

[5] *Among My Books*, Vol. I, Essay on Shakespeare.

"So it behooves a man to act when he thinks to attain enduring praise—he will not be caring for his life." "He who has the chance should work mighty deeds before he die: that is for a mighty man the best memorial."

These quotations from "Beowulf" show that the spirit of courageous and unselfish endeavor is already stirring in the early English blood. "Such stuff," remarks a historian, "was there in the English even when they were heathen." The scop and gleeman, wandering minstrels and early poets of our English race, whose figures serve as a foil to human brutality, as we see them moving amidst the striking scenes of Saxon halls of feasting, knew not as yet the inspiration of Biblical themes. Nevertheless their harps were being attuned by the very nature of their themes for the coming of the nobler Song of the Book of God.

"In characters so strong and serious Christianity became a vital force, directing the currents, not only of life, but of thought and of literature. Accordingly the bringing of this heathen England within the circle of Christendom makes an epoch in the history of English literature."[6]

When Christianity with its wonderful Book is once lodged in the life of this people, it may be expected that they will yield to the new influence to a remarkable degree, and especially that their literature, when it begins to bud and blossom, will to an unusual extent be determined by the presence of such a Book.

[6] *Introduction to English Literature,* by Henry S. Pancoast, p. 30.

II

THE SPIRIT AND TONE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

"The first condition of great literature is a unity of theme and concept that shall give coherence and organization to all detail, however varied. By this test the Bible is great literature."—Prof. Albert S. Cook.

IT is proper in advance of further inquiry, to point out the several directions in which we may look for the influence of the Bible in the making of English literature.

The first and most obvious influence is upon *language, style* and *expression.* Close contact with the Bible invariably produces a profound effect upon human speech. Let men live generation after generation in the atmosphere of this Book, reading its language and absorbing its thought, and their speech will grow more expressive, and more weighty, as if some mysterious mastery had possessed their lips, and exacted tribute of their tongues. The secret of this mastery of the Scripture over human speech is not easy to fathom. Apparently it is the reflection of its own literary qualities, such as Simplicity, Directness, Dignity and Strength. But even so, there is still a haunting echo of inward power in the Bible, which passes into speech, an indefinable quality of emotion which cannot be better described than by the term *Spirituality.*

The Bible discusses its lofty themes ordinarily with such simplicity as at times almost to endanger its supernatural claims. Its language is seldom in the clouds, however supernal the theme. The Revelation of the Apostle John, for example, moving on a high plane of apocalyptic mystery, makes constant use of simple, everyday images of truth. The grand themes of that book are interpreted in terms of candlesticks, crowns, rivers, cities, walls, jewels, and the like. The effect of Biblical diction has been to dignify English speech, to produce a certain masterful quality of simplicity that passes readily into conversation and composition. For generations it has been to men of the English tongue a model of pure, strong, straightforward speech. By eschewing empty words and phrases it has taught them also to make their speech representative of the soul's life. It has produced earnestness in speech, and has created those far-reaching effects of language that furnish literal foundation for the statement of Jesus: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Among all his gifts language is the most flexible, the most responsive, the most delicate instrument in the possession of man. Whatever affects the quality of this instrument affects also the tone of life itself. Language acts in reflex ways upon men. The moralities of a people are always struggling to reach the level of their speech. True and simple diction has an ethical force, and it is in this light that we must estimate the effect of the Bible on language. There are books that exercise a *demoralizing* effect on speech. Men learn from them to speak with less of restraint, less of moral precision, less of the weight and dignity

of spiritual feeling. About such books there is a noxious quality that poisons the very fountains of expression. After the lapse of centuries Boccaccio's *Decameron* still infects the tongues of men, as it does their thoughts also, with its bacterial immoralties. It is impossible to compute the baleful effect of such a book upon the speech of men, to say nothing of their lives. Contrast with such books the writings of the Puritans. However ponderous their thought, they write nevertheless under the influence of a Book that dignifies and moralizes the speech of those who consort with it. The best English speech of today reflects the Puritan influence, whilst in those quarters where our language appears in pathetic ways to have lost its sensitive moral color, we trace the loss correctly to the waning of Puritan influence.

Writing of the influence of the Bible on words, a university professor of English says: "It was for generations the chosen companion of all men, from the highest to the humblest. Consciously or unconsciously it was adopted by everyone as a guide to the best usage. Never, perhaps, in the history of any tongue has a single book so profoundly affected universal expression as has the English Bible. It is not that we now talk or write in the diction employed in it. Even in its own day the language it employed was somewhat archaic. But its simplicity, its beauty, its effectiveness, made it serve from the beginning as a standard of speech, about which the language revolved, and from which it has never got very far. It held up before all an ideal of pure and lofty expression. The familiarity of our fathers with the translation of the Bible, the intimate acquaintance they gained with its

words and phrases, its constructions, its manner, has done more to maintain the purity of our speech than could have been effected by the mastery of all the manuals of verbal criticism which have ever been produced."[1]

The deeper we go into the history of the English language and literature the more distinctly are we aware of an influence that is moralizing words, refining expression, and creating discriminations in speech, which, while they represent the judgment of the mind, tend also to react upon that judgment and to establish it more firmly than before. This influence, beyond all question, is the English Bible. Think of how it has caused such words as *righteousness, justice, purity, honesty, obedience, sincerity, reverence, worship, hope, faith, love,* to obtain currency in English speech. Think of how it has put upon the tongues of men phrases and expressions that have become rubrics of mental and moral force. Think of how it has magnified the importance of language as a factor in life, and how it has established a barrier against the thousand "peering littlenesses" and trivialities of speech, furnishing instead a magnificent language vista for the mind. Think in short of how it has enriched, enlarged, and diversified the power of expression, lifting it ever to higher levels, giving it a wider outlook, and filling it with the reverberations of an unworldly power and grace. Such as these are the claims that may justly be made for the Bible in its effect upon language, style and expression.

[1] From an article in *Harper's Monthly,* June, 1908, on "The Correct Use of Words," by Thomas R. Lounsbury, Emeritus Professor of English in Yale University.

Another very obvious effect of the Bible is seen in its *regulation of the tone of English literature.* This is a far deeper effect than the first-named, yet it is to some extent a resultant of the effect on style and expression. Language is so close to life, that it is bound to react upon life. Improved expression therefore soon registers itself in a higher literary tone. On the other hand, deterioration in style lowers the level of literary feeling. It is important that men should speak well, for thereby they tend to rise to higher levels in their thinking. We meet here with an incidental reason for the use of the Bible in educational circles. To acquaint our youth with the Scripture is to give them at the same time an unvarying standard of good speech, a standard so vital and persistent as to affect also the mental and moral tone. It is impossible for men to breathe the atmosphere of this Book year after year, generation after generation, without rising to a higher level of thought. Thomas Huxley pleaded for the use of the Bible in the schools, because he declared it to be the only great classic within reach of the common people, the reading of which is bound to assist and establish the moral tone of nations.

Yet the power of the Bible in regulating the tone of literature is something more than a resultant of its effect on language. It is in short an effect of atmosphere. It may indeed exist apart from any very obvious effect on style. This is best illustrated by reference to such examples as are to be seen in almost every community of persons not highly gifted in style and expression, who nevertheless reach a high level of thought under the influence of the Bible. It is at such a point that we witness the making of popular feeling

which ultimately registers itself in literature. Literature is not made by influences that work from higher levels downward, but rather by influences that proceed from lower levels upward. The common people are in reality the makers of literature. It is among the people that those representative and interpretative experiences transpire that emerge later by the pen of the writer upon the pages of literature. "The people and not the college is the writer's home," says Emerson. Whatever touches popular feeling, and determines in any degree the tone and color of popular experience, is an important element in the making of literature. The teaching of the Bible in a mission school may have a far-away effect in an improved national character, and an improved national literature as well. Ideals of liberty, of personal integrity, of social conscience and responsibility may thus be set up in the minds of the people, whose reflections will be caught later in the pages of literature. Whatever else may be thought of the Bible, it is a Book so vital and virile as to affect the tone of everything that it touches.

The tone of English literature is nothing imaginary or ecstatic. It is in fact a very pronounced asset of history. No one can read the best books of the English speech without recognizing an effect of something intoning and uplifting, an implicit and assertive spiritual quality that continually breaks forth into explicit forms. "One may roughly say that the spirit of English literature at its best is prophetic, that the essential characteristics of the books which are the record of the thoughts and feelings of the English race are virility, directness, unconsciousness, prepossession with the

higher sides of life, and a noble and uplifting purpose."[2]

How then does the Bible contribute to this definite tone or spirit of English literature? We are attempting no obscure or intricate analysis. Rather we are but trying to state in explicit terms those effects of the Bible that become a personal experience with everyone who comes close enough to it to feel its powerful spell.

Evidently then the Bible contributes to the spirit or tone of literature by furnishing, not to writers alone, but to the people in general, the materials of a vital experience. Literature of a pronounced type cannot exist apart from a rich experience. The more diversified the experience the more positive the literary type. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Now the Bible pours in upon the human mind a vast and diversified, yet also a unified, material of experience—material so concrete, so ready at hand, as to pass over easily into those crystallizations of sentiment which are connoted when we speak of *popular feeling*. Yet it is a process far too delicate to follow in detail. What is clear, however, is that the Biblical material is constantly being transmuted into the gold of experience. Think of any representative incident or narrative of the Bible, the story of Joseph, for example. Here is a compact, concrete formula or rubric of experience. Such an experience in narrative form furnishes not only the material of thought, but also a center or norm about which we may organize our own experience. Such narratives of the Bible

[2] *The Bible as English Literature*, by J. H. Gardiner, Assistant Professor of English in Harvard University, p. 394.

are in reality representative experiences carefully formulated, and ready to be carried over into life and literature.

Or take the most classic illustration of all—the life of Jesus as related in the New Testament. As Professor Denny has said: "When we open the New Testament we find ourselves in the presence of a glowing religious life."[3] Not only does this life insist upon dominating our opinions—even more it insists upon entering as a real factor into our vital experience. This is no doubt the deeper reach of our Lord's question: "What think ye of Christ?" The Son of Man stands at the door and knocks, the door of life, the door of vital experience. It is impossible to state in terms the far-reaching effect of the life of Christ in the New Testament upon popular feeling. Its concrete material, its formulæ and centers of experience, have been carried over into a vital experience of the generations. In the fact of Christ men have found constructive material for their own experience, and have discovered also such creative impulses as have set the mind a-tingling with an inextinguishable craving for action. This universal appeal of the Life of Christ, this claim of the Son of Man to a share of human experience, is among the divinest facts of the current history of Christianity, and the response is by no means limited to the immediate pale of the Christian Church. Our point is that the material furnished in the Life of Christ is so profound and far-reaching in its effect, that we may expect many degrees of vital experience to result from it, and many different forms of creative impulse.

[3] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 1.

Now what is called the tone or spirit of English literature bears unmistakably within it the effect of a vital experience that has come out of contact with the material of the Bible. Our writers consciously and unconsciously have wrought in the atmosphere of this Book. Its universalism, its idealism, its spirituality, have affected the norms of their thought. Its vision of the Eternal, its emphasis of immortality, its insistence upon salvation—and these not as technicalities, but as elements of a real experience—have spread a mighty canvas for English thought, and have produced an unlimited background for English literature.

The whole effect of spirituality in life with its grave problems and difficult interrogatives, the sincere feeling of largeness of treatment, which permits each man to look out from his own doorstep upon the universe, and to feel himself part of a plan, the profound sense of things invisible and inexpressible, the brilliant optimism, the exuberant joy and exhilaration, the general sense of wholesomeness, courage and obligation—these characteristics of English literature are traceable in large part to the tonic effect of the Bible.

The Bible has in fact gone deeper still and has to a large extent *sharpened and determined the very genius* of the English-speaking peoples. "Where there is no vision the people perish." Without a perpetual enlarging vision literature also declines. It is conceivable that without the influence of the Bible the native strength and capacity of the English folk might have shriveled away and become a futile force in human affairs.

For twelve hundred years and more the peoples of English speech have had before their eyes the trans-

forming visions of the Word of God. They have not been made perfect; far from it. Nevertheless the very genius of these peoples has been transformd and energized. The Bible has become naturalized in their experience. It has rendered to them an incalculable service in setting constantly before them the ideals of an invisible kingdom. It has contributed to their mental and spiritual life certain great and constructive ideas, and has stimulated them in the endeavor to crystallize their life about these ideas. It has thus slowly in the passage of years and centuries created, or at least established, a national genius—a genius which with many discrepancies, and many aberrations, is persistently recognized as a spiritual genius. And this spiritual life or genius has expressed itself in a literature—an English literature, which can no more be separated from the Bible than can the colors of the rainbow be untwisted from one another.

III

THE COMING OF THE BOOK

"Bone of our literary bone, and flesh of our literary flesh, it has exercised upon English character an influence moral, social, and political, which it is not possible to measure."—H. W. Hoare.

THE Isle of Thanet forms the eastern extremity of Kent, and there English history proper had its beginning. For it was at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet that Hengest landed with his tribesmen from Jutland in the year 449 or 450. "No spot in Britain can be so sacred to Englishmen as that which first felt the tread of English feet."[1]

As if this were not enough to establish the fame of this one spot of English soil, a century and a half later another band of strangers from a different direction landed on the Isle of Thanet. The year was probably 597, and from this time forward the spot is quite as famous as the landing-place of the Christian monk Augustine and his emissaries from Rome, as of the far-away fathers of the English race. If the first landing at Ebbsfleet made the English people, the second landing at Ebbsfleet determined the character and destiny of the English people. The die of English history, and of English literature as well, was cast

[1] *A Short History of the English People*, by J. R. Green, Chapter I, Section II.

when Augustine and his monks stepped ashore on the sands of Kent in 597. They brought with them the Book of books.

The story of how this came about is preserved for us in the writings of the Venerable Bede. It is a story that fires the imagination and feeds the spirit of romance that is native to men of the English stock. One day in the Forum of Rome an influential priest of the Christian church, Gregory by name, whose hand was already resting, unknown to himself, upon the Primate's chair, stood gazing at a company of foreign slaves exposed for sale. The priest was fascinated by their fair faces, for they were like David, "of a ruddy countenance and fair to look upon." Some touch almost of Christian prophecy is in the story of his anxious curiosity. They were *angels,* he thought, not Angles, as their fair complexion betokened. Their country could not be *Deira* merely, (the name of an English province), but *De ira,* for they must be plucked, he averred, from God's ire by the mercy of Christ. Their king's name moreover, *Ælla,* did it not suggest that "Alleluia shall be sung in Ælla's land?" Such is the picturesque tale that has come down to us.

It is the outcome of this incident that interests us so profoundly, for when this same Gregory came to the papal chair, he could not forget the English captives whom he had seen in the Forum. A church is shown in Rome today, on the site of which Pope Gregory is said to have parted with Augustine and his forty monks when they were starting on their way to England. Imagination lingers long and fondly upon these far-away scenes. Little recked they of the importance of the event. Ethelbert was the King of Kent. It

may be inferred that he was not altogether hostile to Christianity, for he had married Bertha, a Frankish princess and a Christian. A Christian bishop had accompanied her to Kent and had established a center of Christian worship at Canterbury. There were in fact lingering remnants of Christianity in England, that had come down from the second century, having survived the cataclysm of the Saxon invasion in the fifth century.

It is an engaging scene which historians have painted for us, one upon which the mind dwells with the irresistible feelings that possess the great events of history. The king received the strangers under a spreading tree somewhere on the chalk down above the shore where nowadays the eye may see across the marshes the dim outline of the towers of Canterbury. Augustine and his monks approached chanting a litany. They formed a strange and impressive procession, clad as they were in long robes, and bearing aloft a silver Cross and an image of Christ. But more important than images and crucifixes, they bore in their hands rolls of parchment, which were covered with characters that had never before been seen in England. The rolls were the Bible written in the Latin language, at least such important portions of it as the four Gospels and the Psalter; and this was the coming of the Book to England and Englishmen.

If some fortunate collector could but possess himself of these priceless parchments, he would be rich indeed beyond the riches of all the libraries, for the effect of these Latin rolls upon generations unborn is beyond the power of any mind to conceive. The British Museum preserves a manuscript in its Cotton

Collection which brings us very near to the copies brought by Augustine. It is an "interlineated" English Psalter, based upon a Latin Psalter of the seventh century, which is believed to have been sent to Augustine by Gregory not long after his arrival in Kent.

King Ethelbert's reception of the strangers from Rome with their strange symbols and their mysterious Book was at least without hostility. "Your words are fair," he said after the long sermon of the vistors had been interpreted to him, "but they are new and of doubtful meaning." He made no promises for himself or his people, but he offered protection to the newcomers. They were soon at home in Canterbury, where they chanted their litanies and sang their "Alleluias" to the amazement of Saxon onlookers. Nor was it long before Ethelbert yielded as a convert of the new faith, whereupon hundreds and thousands of his Kentish men presented themselves for baptism.[2]

It was a rich gift indeed that Augustine brought to England on the verge of the seventh century, for it was threefold:—the Christian religion, the Hebrew literature, and the Roman forms of writing. At such a point in history the imagination loves to stand unharnessed, and to run without rein forward into the years. What masterful effects these simple parchments will work throughout the years! How impressive also is the Providence that has given this wonderful Book into the possession of a people so richly endowed as were these early English folk! Consider the spiritual capacities that lie slumbering in this Teutonic blood. Consider the power of the Book

[2] See Green's *Short History of the English People*, Chapter I, Section III.

itself to mold the thoughts of men, even to refine the genius of a people that could express itself so nobly, albeit so rudely, in such a voice as that of "Beowulf." Consider the effect of the New Testament with its wonderful story of the suffering Savior upon the imagination of this fighting race, how it would appeal to their sense of the heroic, and inspire them to deeds of valor and unselfishness. The situation is one of commanding interest, and magnificent prospect. An example of the effect of the story of the Cross upon the eagerness of a militant state of mind is seen in the familiar story of King Clovis, who, when he had witnessed the Passion Play exclaimed, "If I had only been there with my Franks!"

"Imagine," writes a historian, "this poetry of the South, with its odors of spices, its music of sounding harp and tinkling cymbal, its visions of green pastures and still waters, all at once mingled with the songs of gleemen who sang at barbaric feasts, where warriors clothed in skins spilled mead to the memory of dead heroes, and celebrated the glories of bloody warfare. Think of the melodious rhythm of these English singers blending all at once with the melody of the harp-strings that the Hebrew bard had struck by the waters of Judea, under the glowing skies of the Orient."[3]

If one could throw the generations of English history into an alembic and examine them by a minute process of qualitative analysis, he would discover from the day that Ethelbert welcomed the visitors under the spreading tree in Kent, that a new and

[3] *Familiar Talks on English Literature,* by Abby Sage Richardson, p. 26.

powerful element was present; he would become aware of a deep infiltration of Biblical thought and feeling; he would observe the quickening effect of new impulses and energies, of new visions and heroisms; and more than this he would observe a contagious influence passing into the life of the people, that must profoundly affect the making of literature.

IV

EARLY RISERS OF LITERATURE

"Early risers of literature, who gather phrases with the dew still on them."—James Russell Lowell.

WE need not follow in detail the story of how England accepted the Gospel, and with it the wonderful Book that was destined to enter so profoundly into its life and literature. The progress of Christianity was by leaps and bounds, although in some quarters, as in Mercia under Penda, paganism held stoutly to its ground.

With the conversion of Ethelbert Kent became at once a center of the new faith with Canterbury as headquarters. Soon the light of Christianity shone afar, and fell among the dark shadows of the forests of Northumbria. King Edwin the powerful ruler of Northumbria whose sway reached far to the North, and whose name is preserved in that of Eadwine's burgh, or Edinburgh, is reported to have been baptized on Easter Day, 627. The figure of the saintly Paulinus, missionary to Northumbria, described as of "tall stooping form, slender aquiline nose, and black hair falling round a thin worn face," may suggest the type of devotion that carved out a highway for the Gospel in the forest and fenland of heathen England.[1]

[1] Cf. Wordsworth's "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," Part I, XV. Paulinus.

At the council called by King Edwin to consider the adoption of Christianity an aged ealderman arose and said, "So seems life, O King, as a sparrow's flight through the hall where a man is sitting at meat in the wintertide with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, but the chill rainstorm without. The sparrow flies in at one door and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearth-fire, and then flying forth from the other, vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of man in our sight, but what is before it and what after it, we know not. If this new teaching tell us aught certainly of these, let us follow it." The incident betokens the presence of that imaginative gift of the early English mind, which under the touch of the Christian Scripture would soon blossom out in Northumbria into the first English poetry.

From another direction, however, the light broke forth even more brilliantly upon the north of England. It was the flaming zeal of Irish missionaries—for Ireland had long been Christian, thanks to Patrick and others—that flashed out over Northumbria. The vigor of the Irish church of the sixth and seventh centuries is to this day a marvel to the historians. "For a time," says Green, "it seemed as if the course of the world's history was to be changed, as if the elder Celtic race that Roman and German had swept before them had turned to the moral conquest of their conquerors, as if Celtic and not Latin Chritianity was to mould the destinies of the Churches of the West." [2]

Nor was the growth of Irish Christianity character-

[2] *A Short History of the English People,* Chapter I, Section III.

ized by missionary zeal alone: letters and arts accompanied it, and for a time Durrow and Armagh were the "universities of the West." It is important for our theme to observe the infusion at this point of Celtic enthusiasm and genius into the making of English literature. The great figures of the Irish missionaries who are dimly seen moving upon the stage of Northumbrian life in the seventh century seem as much the forerunners of poetic literature as of a missionary Gospel. With Celtic fervor and imagination they imbibed, not only the sacrificial spirit of the Gospel, but also the flavor of spiritual romance with which the Christian Scripture abounds. And when they speak we seem to discover in their words the early dew of Scripture, caught in minds that were more than susceptible to the touch of poetry.

On the Island of Iona off the Scottish coast the Irish priest Columba established a Christian monastery, and from this as a center the tide of Irish Christianity flowed over the north of England. Columba himself was in love with poetry, and he thought it not unbefitting a priest to indulge his strong passion for manuscripts. The "Book of Durrow" in Trinity College is attributed to him, and there are at least three Latin hymns, two of them on the Trinity, that may have come from the heart of the good Irish missioner.

One of the most picturesque of the Celtic poet-preachers was Aidan, who heeded the call to Northumbria from Iona when others had returned in despair, and whose monastery established in the island-peninsula of Lindisfarne, later known as Holy Island, became a center of spiritual and literary light.

In the days of King Oswald, forerunner of the greater Alfred, Aidan wandered amongst the people, preaching and teaching, and sowing the seeds of thought and feeling in a receptive soil.

But the most engaging of all the far-away figures of the early missionaries in England is Cuthbert, "the most lovable of English saints." Following the sheep-walk among the Scottish hills, he was even in youth touched with a "poetic sensibility" which might have made him a poet, if he had not become a peasant-preacher. He is an example of the temperament which found in Christianity and its Book a new world of feeling, and fresh material for those simple processes of the popular mind, which underlie the making of literature. As he wandered among the people, preaching simply but fervently from the Book of books, he was sowing deep in English soil the seeds of literature. Referring to Cuthbert's country Green the historian has this to say—"To-day the land is a land of poetry and romance. Cheviot and Lammermoor, Ettrick and Teviotdale, Yarrow and Annan-water, are musical with old ballads and border minstrelsy."[3]

It is not without significance that we see Cuthbert in one of the early scenes of his life with his teacher Boisil, to whose sick-bed he had been summoned, bending over the Gospel of John which they read together. Of like interest also is the incident of his own last hours. When the signal from Cuthbert's island-hermitage told his brethren at Lindisfarne that the saint was dying, it happened that the monks were

[3] *A Short History of the English People,* Chapter I, Section III.

singing the words of a psalm, a prophecy of the day when men of Cuthbert's temperament would sing in English the refrain of Old Testament Psalm and New Testament lyric.

Few more precious documents of the past are to be seen anywhere than the famous "Lindisfarne Gospels," or "Gospels of St. Cuthbert," which Sir Robert Cotton placed with other priceless manuscripts in the British Museum. The manuscript belonged at one time to Durham Cathedral, and is supposed to have been in use by no less a person that Cuthbert himself.[4] It is not too much to say that documents such as these are the real foundations, as they are the early beginnings, of our literature. Over the few scant pages of their Psalters and Gospels our spiritual and literary progenitors hung, drinking deeply of that well of inspiration until their very minds were saturated with Biblical phrase and feeling.

From what has been said the importance of monastic institutions in these early centuries has already been implied. The emergence of these centers of religious life in the darkness of the newly-made Christian England may be freely regarded as one of the providences of history, and no student of English literature can afford to neglect them in his survey. The seventh and eighth centuries constitute a period of remarkable missionary zeal, and the monastic institutions were the natural centers and promoters of the new enthusiasm. Not only so—they became also the centers of learning and the sources of literary growth. "All that was spiritual, poetical, and thoughtful in the Engles of the north responded to the

[4] *The Evolution of the English Bible,* H. W. Hoare, p. 35.

teaching of the first Irish missionaries, and the monasticism there planted proved most favorable to the refining of the rude genius of the race. Poets, scholars, and apostles found their calling and their preparation in the religious communities that rose quickly in the Northumbrian field. Cuthbert, the most lovable of English saints; Caedmon, who became the first of known English poets; Bede, 'the venerable Bede,' as he has always been named with reverence; Alcuin, friend, counselor, and teacher of Charlemagne; these are among the shining names they had placed on the roll of great Englishmen before the eighth century was closed."[5]

The student may read in Green's illuminative volume, *The Making of England,* an interesting account of the spread of monastic institutions in northern England, which the historian regards, despite its ill effects, as "an effort of Englishmen to free themselves from the trammels of their older existence and to find a more social and industrial life."[6] It led to a new estimate of labor, for even earls and nobles often betook themselves to these religious houses and manifested their humility by doing common manual tasks. The labors of such a house were commonly divided, some laboring with their hands, and others devoting themselves to reading.

It is in the latter occupation that we see the seedplot of literature. The love of letters goes with God's Book, and even in that early day, when the Book existed in parchments only, the passion for books began to possess the souls of men. "The monks were

[5] *History of England,* Larned, p. 31.
[6] Chapter VII.

the painters, the illuminators, the architects, the carvers, the gilders, and the bookbinders of their time."[7] An old monastic saying—"A monastery without a library is like a castle without an armory"—throws light upon the passionate feeling which Christian men had in that far-away time—men whose minds were fired by the Word of God—for the cherishing of letters.

"The monasteries were the only respectable seminaries of learning in the darker ages, and the only secure repositories for the sacred and profane treasures of antiquity. The most eminent scholars which England produced, both in philosophy and humanity, before and even below the twelfth century, were educated in our religious houses. The encouragement given in the English monasteries for transcribing books caused the multiplication and embellishment of many copies. In every great abbey there was an apartment called the Scriptorium, where many writers were constantly employed in transcribing, not only service books for the choir, but books for the library. The whole process of book-making was carried on within the cloister. The writers, illuminators and binders, all followed their respective occupations in the monastic habit."[8]

Mr. Chapman in his persuasive volume, *English Literature in Account With Religion,* refers to the influence of the monasteries upon letters, calling it for lack of a better phrase, "the precedent influence of

[7] *The Story of Ireland,* Lawlers, p. 49.

[8] *Catalogi Veteres Librorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelm,* publication of the Surties Society, edited by James Raine. From the Preface by Beriah Batfield.

religion upon literature." "Monasteries and convents," he affirms, "were for generations the home and refuge of letters. The Church has always been the nursing-mother of literature—often enough unwise, petulant, over-anxious and sometimes even cruel in her fear, but yet fostering and passing on from generation to generation, if not sound learning itself, yet the tools and means for its development."[9] Montalembert also declares in his *Monks of the West* that the monasteries were great centers of literature.

It is difficult to realize at so great a distance the influence of the monastic schools which arose as by magic under the spell of devout and eager monks. Too often the story of monastic abuses obscures the real contribution of these institutions of Christianity to the world's civilization. There can be no mistaking the impetus they gave to intellectual life and to literature. Latin culture flowed in by the channels that were now open to Rome, and under Christian auspices literature began to live. It was one of the most remarkable transformations that history has witnessed, producing in a few generations amongst an unlettered and heathen people men who became the intellectual lights of Europe. "The birthplace of English literature in England," writes a historian, "is thus within the shadow of the Church. For centuries its history centers about monasteries such as those which Biscop planted; quiet strongholds and retreats where poet, chronicler, and teacher, nourished on some fragments of past learning, were sheltered from the coarse violence without."[10]

[9] P. 25.

[10] *Introduction to English Literature,* Pancoast, p. 32.

But what is even more to the point is the fact that the members of these first English cloisters did not shut themselves within monastic walls. Rather they moved freely among the people, sometimes as wandering clergy, again as minstrels with a spiritual motive; and wherever they went they filled the ears and hearts of the people with the sound of the Scripture. It must have been a very subtle, yet very powerful process of education. At least it was a sure process of saturating the popular mind with Biblical ideals and feelings. Along with heroic odes that echoed the sound of their warlike history, there was mingled the sound of Biblical ode and epic. In the long centuries of deprivation in which the people knew not the comforting touch of a book, nor even the ability to read for themselves, their ears became attuned nevertheless to that deep echo of poetry and emotion which men of sentiment always hear in the Bible.

An authentic, as well as interesting, instance of this popular education is that of Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury, and later Bishop of Sherborne, whose period covers the latter half of the seventh century and the early years of the eighth century. Aldhelm studied under Hadrian at the Canterbury school, and then went among the West-Saxons to preach the Gospel. He was still famous in the day of King Alfred, who told how "Aldhelm won men to heed sacred things by taking stand as a gleeman and singing English songs on a bridge." The truth is that the good abbot was driven to this device, as many a modern preacher has been, by the indifference of the people. Observing how careless they were of the preaching, and being himself gifted as a musician, he

was accustomed to don the garb of a minstrel and wait on a bridge for the peasantry to pass, singing to them the Gospel story in fascinating song. It is an engaging picture of this early Saxon poet-preacher standing forth on a bridge to sing the Scripture into the hearts of the people. In such a scene the Bible appears early in the making of English literature. It was Aldhelm who was the first translator of the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon English. Whether we possess the Psalter of Aldhelm in the Paris manuscript is a matter of grave doubt.[11] It can be truly said, however, that the influence of the Psalms thus early brought in touch with English thought has never departed. Says Prothero in his volume on the Psalms, "Apart from their own transcendent beauty and universal truth, the Psalms have enriched the world by the creation of a literature which, century after century, has not only commanded the admiration of sceptics, but elevated the characters of innumerable believers, encouraged their weariness, consoled their sorrows, lifted their doubts, and guided their wandering footsteps.[12]

The sound of Psalmody indeed is heard everywhere in these first centuries of Christian England. "To learn the Psalter by heart was, in monastic life, the first duty of a novice." Missionary and monk, secular priest and anchorite, derived strength from the Psalms. "The words lived in his mind; they were ever on his lip; in them his thoughts were unconsciously clothed; in them his cry for help was

[11] *The Ancestry of our English Bible,* Ira M. Price, p. 210.
[12] *The Psalms in Human Life,* Rowland E. Prothero, p. 9.

naturally expressed."[13] "In such duties of monastic life, whether homely or sacred, as making bread for the altar, setting out the relics, attending the death-agony of a brother, taking places at the refectory, the weekly washing of feet, the beginning and end of readings during meals, psalms were sung or recited."[14]

If the reader will but try to reproduce to his own mind a state of affairs in which men lived and worked, met their decisions and crises, suffered their defeats and won their victories, and at length faced the last great enemy himself, with the ringing phrases of the Psalms filling their memories, and nerving their souls, he will be able to understand in some measure the shaping of the English mind under the powerful impact of the Scripture, an effect which could not fail to register itself in literature.

A popular infusion of Biblical knowledge took place. The minstrelsy of the Teuton passed over insensibly into Christian song. A vernacular poetry soon arose which bore the stamp and image of the Word of God.[15] Into the wistful feelings of untutored minds were infiltrated the strange uplift and strength of the Book, and here and there appeared the blossom of poetry and romance upon an otherwise homely stock. The songs of Hebrew bards stirred the latent poetry of English blood. It was the sort of poetry that sings in the blood before it reaches the lip in utterance; and it was inevitable that the sound of English poetry would ere long fill the land. It was impossible that men of English stock should associate

[13] *The Psalms in Human Life,* Rowland E. Prothero, p. 46.
[14] Ibid., p. 60.
[15] *The Evolution of the English Bible,* H. W. Hoare, pp. 28-30.

themselves so closely for generations with the Bible in the intense quiet of the monastic houses that were scattered throughout the country, without producing surprising results in literature, results that are flowing still. For what is true of the early poets of the race, is also true of later ones—they have with few exceptions drunk deeply at the well of Scripture.

V

SCHOLAR AND PEASANT

"I was an herdman . . . and the Lord took me from following the flock."—The Prophet Amos.

THE names of four men deserve particular mention as promoters of the growth of literature in England in the seventh century. These are Theodore who was born in St. Paul's town of Tarsus, and had studied Greek in Athens; Benedict Biscop who was in reality a Northumbrian by birth, but had made more than one journey to Rome and had studied there; Adrian or Hadrian, an African monk; and Wilfrid the famous bishop of York. To trace the influence of these men would be to reveal the springs of English culture.

Cut off as England had been for at least a century and a half from the life and intellect of the Continent, it was Christianity that brought it again into contact with the outer world. Strangely enough the light of Eastern learning which had been overwhelmed in the West by the catastrophe of Rome and the advent of the Dark Ages, was rekindled in far-away England, a new-born land on the very verge of Christendom.

Theodore of Tarsus, one of the four just mentioned, became Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 669, and there, assisted by his friend Hadrian, he

established and fostered a school which soon became a center of the new culture. At a time when Greek was becoming a memory in Western Europe the pupils of this new English school were being taught this language. From Canterbury, where of course all studies centered in the Bible, the light shone throughout England. To this center of learning aspiring spirits came to light their torches, and returned to the darkness of their own provinces, creating wherever they went new circles of light. Such an one was Aldhelm whose story we have already briefly recited.

The labors of Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid bore fruit especially in Northumbria, and this northern province was for a time "the literary center of Western Europe."[1] England's debt to Biscop is incalculable. It is said that he visited Rome six times, "now seeking architects, masons and materials to beautify his churches; now bringing with him musicians or instructors in ritual; now gathering relics, pictures, images and vestments; now collecting the manuscripts which made his libraries famous."[2]

An educational era began in the north, with the monastic schools as centers of influence. The passion of books possessed men, and manuscripts were treasured like gold. Books were brought in considerable number from Rome, and the schools at Lindisfarne, York, Wearmouth, Tynemouth, Jarrow and Whitby wielded wide influence.

When the work of Northumbria for Christianity in the seventh and eighth centuries is summed up, it is possible to say, not only that it had won England

[1] *The Making of England,* J. R. Green, Chapter VIII.
[2] *The Psalms in Human Life,* R. E. Prothero, pp. 62, 63.

from heathendom to the Christian Church, but to say also, as the historian Green does, that it had given England a new poetic literature.[3] These northern schools became intensive centers of culture, and the best proof of this is found in the fact that they produced such scholars as Bede and Alcuin. "It may be said", writes Bishop Stubbs, "that the civilization and learning of the eighth century rested in the monastery which he (Biscop) founded, which produced Bede, and through him, the school of York, Alcuin, and the Carolingian school, on which the culture of the Middle Ages was based."[4] So far-reaching in the judgment of students was the influence of the schools of northern England where Christian monks studied and copied and illuminated the Word of God.

It was for Bishop Wilfrid of York, whose passion for books was like that of others, although his personal history is written in storms—it was for him that some skilful Anglo-Saxon scribe or scribes of the seventh century made a beautiful copy of the Gospels, since called "The Golden Gospels," on purple vellum in letters of burnished gold—a precious book out of the long past which has come at length to rest in the palatial library of an American collector.[5] In that age Christian men were content to make copies of the Word of God. The time soon came when their ambition broadened and they aimed to carry the wealth of Scripture over into the making of literature.

[3] *Short History of the English People,* Chapter I, Section III.

[4] Quoted in Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Biography,* Vol. I, p. 309.

[5] J. Pierpont Morgan, New York. The "Golden Gospels," were given to Henry VIII by Pope Leo X.

Streonshealh was the ancient name of a seventh century abbey that crowned the cliffs above the rugged Northumbrian shore. It was founded by Saint Hilda about the year 657. When the Danes destroyed the abbey in 867 they gave the town a new name, Whitby, or White-town. The magnificent ruins now seen on the cliff above the town belong to a second abbey which was built on the site of Hilda's house. It was Whitby that was the scene of the famous Synod, when the disputed questions of the tonsure and the date of Easter were finally settled, and the life of the English church was turned from Irish into Roman channels—an occasion on which it is said Bishop Wilfrid's eloquence was irresistible. The busy docks and herring fisheries of the modern Whitby seem a far cry from the day when in the thatched house on the cliffs the sound of Psalmody was heard all day long.

Hilda herself must have been a woman of strong personality. She was of royal race, and her name casts a spell over early English history to this day. It is to Whitby we must go to look upon the real cradle of English literature. For great as was the fame of the Abbess Hilda, her fame has suffered an eclipse by one who came, like his Lord, from the manger and the stall.

Whitby was the home of Caedmon. His name is at the same time a prototype of English literature, and an example of the profound and moving effect of the Scripture upon latent genius. In Caedmon we see the prolific and passionate material of the Bible passing through the Celtic-Saxon mold into a new English form. He comes forth out of the deep past, yet his appearance is that of a herald of a great future. In

a sense, as Hoare has said, "he belongs almost as much to the history of the English Bible as to the history of English literature."[6] A deep vein of poetry lay hidden within his untutored mind; it was the Bible that inspired and defined his utterance. The earliest of English poets, called for his rugged and natural vigor "the Amos of English literature," he was the first to give utterance in rude but powerful verse to the poetic grandeur and lofty imagery of the Scripture. The passion of his verse reflects the Hebrew fervor, but it contains also the new beat of the Teutonic measure of feeling. In this unexpected poet of the seventh century we see the prophecy of a long line of English singers, in whom new realms of fancy will unfold, and in whose hand fresh materials of poetry will find play.

How unheralded this truly Biblical poet was the fascinating story in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* relates. Like Amos who was called "from following the flock" to prophesy, Caedmon was called from among the cattle to stand forth and sing. His story, though often told, loses none of its charm by repetition. Caedmon was a man of "secular habit" in the monastery at Whitby, and was well advanced in years when the great event of his life transpired. From long listening to the monastic services his mind had become saturated with the Scripture; but he lacked the power to utter his thought. In the evening when the work was done and all gathered in the hall, and the song went around the circle as the harp was passed to each one in turn, Caedmon often rose and left the place, because he could not sing. One night when this had

[6] *The Evolution of the English Bible,* H. W. Hoare, p. 25.

occurred, he went away to the stable and lay down on the hay to sleep among the cattle.

As he slept One appeared to him and said, "Sing, Caedmon, some song to me." "But I cannot sing," was his answer. "For this cause I left the feast and came hither." "But you shall sing," said the Visitor. "What shall I sing?" he inquired. "Sing the beginning of created things," the Person of his dreams instructed him.

And so it came to pass that when Caedmon told the Abbess Hilda in the morning about his dream, she and the brethren concluded that "heavenly grace had been given him by the Lord." Whereupon they gave to Caedmon a passage of the Bible, bidding him put it into poetry, and to their great surprise he returned the next day with the passage rendered in excellent Anglo-Saxon verse.

Thus Caedmon began, according to Bede's story, and little by little he wrought the Biblical account into a rude but wonderful Paraphrase. "He sang," says Bede, "of the creation of the world, of the origin of man, and of all the history of Israel; of their departure from Egypt and entering into the Promised Land; of the incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ; of the terror of future judgment, the horror of hell pangs, and the joys of heaven."

It is not to be wondered at that men of his day regarded it as a sign of supernatural power that this common man should break forth in song. To us it appears to be a remarkable example of the power of the Bible to saturate and inspire the mind of one who was possessed of natural though latent gifts. It was the Bible that produced this first English singer; its

images fastened themselves upon his poetic imagination; its scenes of battle and of struggle appealed to the fiery temper of his Saxon blood; its grandeur awed him and its mystery possessed him.

The old Teutonic minstrelsy lived again in this Saxon bard, only now it bore upon it a deep mark of Biblical impression. Caedmon is the early Milton of the race. The same Hebraic fervor is in him in rudiment that later possessed the Puritan poet. "Milton's Satan," says Taine, "exists already in Caedmon, as the picture exists in the sketch." D'Israeli refers to him explicitly as the "Milton of our forefathers." It is not improbable indeed that Milton's epical presentation of Scriptural scenes found its remote suggestion in the rude alliterations of the Anglo-Saxon poet. In both the earlier and later poet there is the same broad canvas of Scripture and the same vivid picturing of great events. In Caedmon the ark is "the floating-house, the greatest of floating-chambers, the wooden fortress, the moving roof, the cavern, the great sea-chest." When he describes Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea it is in such dramatic language as this:—"The folk was affrighted, the flood-dread seized on their sad souls: ocean wailed with death, the mountain heights were with blood besteamed, the sea foamed gore, crying was in the waves, the water full of weapons, a death-mist rose." A very active imagination is here at work with the Biblical material.

The Saxon spirit of adventure and warfare found abundant material in the Bible. The Old Testament with its stirring scenes appealed to the Germanic sense of mystery and grandeur. Caedmon's mind was the workshop, or better the laboratory, in which we see

for the first time the mingling of native aptitudes with the material of the Scripture. He lived probably about the year 670, and he is rightly described as the father of English poetry. That the first English singer drew his inspiration so directly from the fountain-head of Scripture is a memorable fact for the student of English literature. From that day to this the Bible has been the copious inspirer of English poetry.

It was inevitable, of course, that the critics would deal harshly with Bede's beautiful story of the call of Caedmon, and the origin of his *Paraphrase.* But whether the Caedmon legend be accepted or not, there is a considerable body of literature remaining which must be accounted for, and which the critics themselves are willing to describe as Caedmonian. This embodies the sacred epics known as *Genesis, Exodus, Daniel, Christ,* and *Satan,* which are contained in a West Saxon manuscript of the tenth century, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and which corresponds with the substance of Caedmon's *Paraphrase* as described by the Venerable Bede. The figure of the first English poet is dim and distant to be sure, but his identity is scarcely to be doubted, albeit legend has been busy with his name. As the first of our English singers he found his way to the deep well of Scripture, and a long line of poets has followed him in a like pilgrimage to the Word of God. No student of English literature can read the simple lines of Caedmon's "Glory-Father" without discovering at once the source of that thrill which has been felt throughout the generations of English poetry.

"Now we should praise
The Guardian of the Heavenly Kingdom;
The Mighty-Creator,
And the thoughts of his mind,
Glorious Father of his works." [7]

We have endeavored thus to reproduce to the mind as far as possible the background of English life and literature. That background was created in large part by Celtic and Saxon history, and was mediated and controlled by certain influences of heredity and environment. The power that moulded these natural conditions, however, was exerted by the Bible. It entered very deeply into the life of the people. The common folk acquired a Biblical trend of thought. The Scripture narratives appealed mightily to their imagination and touched their heroic spirit. Their "wistful curiosity about the unseen world" found an inspiring answer in the Bible, and minstrelsy and song sprang irresistibly into being. Both early and late the Bible has made poetry. Wherever it is read the heart begins to sing.

[7] A fragment preserved in Alfred's Saxon Version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. It is a paraphrase of the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis, and is pronounced by Sharon Turner in his History of Anglo-Saxons (III, 260) the most ancient piece of Anglo-Saxon poetry we possess. See *The History of the English Bible* by Blackford Condit, p. 24.

VI

AN EARLY BIBLICAL POET

"That silent literature which is, as it were, the background of the literature which is written."—Stopford Brooke.

IN the preceding chapters we have endeavored to see something of the background of early English life out of which emerged the first literature of the English people. For the most part there is a great silence, a silence nevertheless that grows constantly fuller and more intense, and that becomes articulate from time to time in audible voices.

It would require a skill altogether too delicate to describe the ways by which the minds of men were informed and inspired for the task of laying the foundations of English literature. There must have been with the first writers a profound unconsciousness of what they were doing. Nevertheless there is an engaging and impressive grandeur about such far-away figures as Caedmon and Aldhelm, that makes a glory in the night. The historian Green had no need to apologize for the fault of passing by with little space the conventional figures of military and political history and giving larger room to "the figures of the missionary, the poet, the printer, the merchant, or the philosopher." Such as these are the

real makers of the nation, and it is difficult to imagine a more interesting setting of circumstance and environment than that which contributed to the making of our first poets.

We have already dwelt upon the familiar and ever impressive story of the bringing of the Book to England, and have remarked upon the powerful Providence that directed the early entrance of this wedge of light into English life. We have seen the energy of the new Faith directing at once the formation of powerful centers of light and learning at Canterbury in the south, and in Northumbria and York in the north. We have seen also the dimly-outlined figures of the Celtic missionaries, such as Aidan and Cuthbert, who brought their racial fire and fancy as a contribution to the elements that were already gathering for a nation's life and literature. We have seen how the monasteries, especially in the north, became centers of an intensive culture that fed upon the Scripture; and we have seen also how not only those who dwelt within these houses, but the people roundabout, were becoming saturated with the Word of God. Unexpected as the coming of Caedmon, the first poet, was, we must have felt that he was a natural product of conditions created by the schools. Given the native genius and temperament of the Anglo-Saxon, with infiltrations also of Celtic imagination, the impact of Biblical material was certain to produce an early poet. That poet was Caedmon, the farm-servant of Whitby.

Not long after Caedmon another voice of a poet, sweet with the cadence of Scripture, is heard in the north of England. This is Cynewulf, about whom the same uncertainties exist as to authorship, and even

identity, that have clouded the name of the great bard of Avon. Be it said however, that there is a cycle of English verse beginning in the latter part of the seventh century and extending to the early part of the ninth, representing the flourishing period of Northumbrian literature, that deserves a better fate than that of remaining forever anonymous.

The subjects of these poems are nearly always religious, and usually scriptural. Metrical paraphrases of the Psalms are frequent, and the poem "Judith" which contains a description of the killing of Holofernes, is based on the Apocrypha. Many of these poems are doubtless little more than vagrant products, but even these issued from that silent storehouse of experience and emotion which the Bible, by a gradual process of percolation and absorption, was creating in the popular mind. Moreover the period shows signs at least of that intellectual constructiveness which is almost certain to ensue upon close popular contact with the Bible. It is impossible that the obscure poet Cynewulf should have written all the poems that have been assigned to him, but there are three at least, and these very notable indeed, "Juliana," "Christ," and "Elene," which may be credited to his name.[1]

[1] The titles of other poems (Cynewulf's?) are "The Dream of the Holy Rood," "Andreas," "Guthlac," "The Fates of the Apostles" ("Andreas" in fact is a part of the last named). "Christ," and "Juliana" are contained in the Exeter Book. "Elene," or "The Finding of the Cross," is found in the Vercelli Manuscript. "The Dream of the Holy Rood" is prefixed to "Elene." We append here the acrostic passage from "Christ," containing the name of the poet, in the English translation as given by Bishop Stubbs in *The Christ of Eng-*

Little is known of Cynewulf, except that he was a Northumbrian, born early in the eighth century, and educated probably in one of the northern monasteries, Whitby, Jarrow, Lindisfarne, or Wearmouth. Obscure though he is, Cynewulf is claimed not only by Northumbria, but also by Wessex, and by East Anglia. Professor Cook of Yale University thinks that he may have been identical with a certain Cynulf, a priest of Dunwich, a seaport on the East-Anglian coast, and Dean Stubbs has given some support to this theory. Cynewulf, unlike Caedmon, was an educated man. Caedmon knew no Latin, and was compelled to sing in English verse. "Cynewulf," as Professor Cook has said, "is the first Christian poet who, being thoroughly conversant with Latin, deliberately adopted the vernacular as the vehicle for a considerable body of poetry, and in this showed himself at once a good scholar, a good Christian, and a good patriot."

In the library of Exeter Cathedral there is an ancient roll of manuscript that is known as "The Exeter Book." It was placed there in the year 1071 by Leofric, the first Bishop of Exeter. Its contents

lish Poetry, note 4, p. 38 (Hulsean lectures given at Cambridge University, 1904-5. The first lecture is devoted to Cynewulf).

C. Then the *keen* shall quake: he shall hear the Lord,
The Heaven's ruler, utter words of wrath
To those who in the world obeyed Him ill,
While they might solace find more easily
Y.N. for their *Yearning* and their *Need;* Many afeard
shall wearily await upon that plain
what penalty he will adjudge to them
W. for their deeds. The *Winsomeness* of earthly gauds
U. Shall then be changed. In days of yore *Unknown*
L. Lake-floods embraced the region of life's joy
F. and all earth's *Fortune.*

have a thrilling interest for the student of literature. In the Catalogue it is described by a contemporary Anglo-Saxon hand as "a mickle English book on all sorts of things wrought in verse." The first place in this manuscript is given to Cynewulf's "Christ," which Dean Stubbs refers to as "the oldest Christiad of modern Europe."

In this poem the influence of the New Testament story is everywhere present. The genius of this far-away English poet is lighted up as by a supernatural illumination.[2] The light of God in the face of Christ falls upon one whose poetic gift is the prophecy of English poetry in the long centuries to come. Cynewulf is properly described as the early Tennyson of English poetry, or better still, as the early Browning, for there is in his poetry something of Browning's mysterious enchantment. He is not the poet of the obvious, but rather of the unseen and the imaginative. Already in him we catch the note of deep emotion which is so frequently heard in English poetry. The tale of the Christ expands in his hands and becomes a story of dramatic literary power. "God himself," he says, "unlocked the power of poetry in my breast."

The significance of the new poetry in contrast with the older pagan poetry is at once apparent in Cynewulf. "The poetry of the past drew its elements only from war, nature-myths, and ancestral heroism. The new poetry, or the new poetic feeling, drew its elements from the whole of human life, entered into all

[2] A single portion of Cynewulf's "Christ," called "The Harrowing of Hell," contains references to nine books of the Bible. See *Biblical Quotations in Old English Prose Writers*, A. S. Cook, p. 87.

the outgoings of the human heart, found its subjects in the common doings of daily life."[3] Not that the old subjects are not renewed. "All the old subjects live again," says Stubbs, "in his pages—battle and voyage, mead-hall and race-course, jewels and fair women—but subordinated to his higher purpose, heightened and transfigured by the vision of the eternal behind the temporal." To Cynewulf Christ stands a living, moving and loving Personality, "the Strong Son of God, Immortal Love," of Tennyson's later "In Memoriam." The echoes of Psalm, Prophecy, Epistle and Apocalypse are in such dramatic lines as these—

"Lo, the Holy Hero—warrior King of Glory,
He the Helm of Heaven, hath arrayed the war
Right against his ancient foes, with his only might.

* * * * *

Now will he seek the spirit's throne of grace,
He, the Savior of souls, the proper bairn of God,
After his war-play! Forward now, ye comrades,
Frankly march along! Open, O ye gates!
He will into you. He, of all the wielder,
He, the City's King—He Creation's Lord,
Now his folk will lead, reft from the devils,
To the joy of joys, by his own victory."

The writer of these vivid lines had read the Gospels. He must also have pondered deeply upon the Apostle Paul's description in the Epistle to the Colossians of the personal glory and triumph of Christ, who despoiled the principalities and powers and made a show of them openly. Whether he became a monk and a priest, as tradition reports, or not, we cannot fully

[3] *Early English Literature,* Stopford Brooke, Vol. I, p. 266.

determine. It is evident however, that he read the Bible eagerly, and filled his mind to overflowing with its language and incident. His rich affluence of sentiment, his picturesque and vivid presentation of the themes, his dramatic conception of the exalted facts of the Gospel, all betoken his deep conversance with the Word. The quickening effect of the Bible upon native genius finds in Cynewulf a notable example. It was to him the seed-plot of ideas, it furnished rich material for his imagination, it offered also such norms and rubrics of expression as grew in the poet's hands into glowing forms of literary grace and power.

The naturalization of the Bible in English life and literature had now begun, and we shall see the process continuing throughout the generations. "Considering the naturalization—far more complete than in any other country—which the Bible was to undergo in England, and the extent to which English literature was to be permeated by it, the derivation of the earliest Anglo-Saxon poems from the Scriptures is a phenomenon of the deepest significance."[4]

Cynewulf sees in his poetic vision the white hands of Christ pierced with nails. To him the iron nails shine like stars and glitter like jewels. To him also Christ is a veritable sunburst out of the East, flooding the world with day. No wonder Dean Stubbs confesses that upon his first reading of Cynewulf's "Christ," he was "astonished at the lofty sublimity and power of this great Christian epic of the Northern Church in the eighth century: this noble story of our salvation with its trumpet-tongued passages of

[4] *Illustrated History of English Literature,* Garnett and Gosse, p. 24.

joy and piety: its pathetic, wailing lyrics of passionate prayer and supplication: its vivid, dramatic pictures, its rushing choric outbursts of praise and victory.[5]

The poem is divided into three parts, the Nativity, the Ascension, and the Day of Judgment. The invocation at the opening thus addresses Christ:—

"O King! Thou art the wall-stone,
which of old the workmen
from their work rejected!
Well it thee beseemeth
that Thou hold the headship
of this Hall of Glory,
and should'st join together
with a fastening firm
the broad-spaced walls
of the flint unbreakable
all fitly framed together;
that among earth's dwellers
all with sight of eyes
may forever wonder:
O Prince of glory!
now through skill and wisdom
manifest Thy handiwork,
true-fast, and firm-set
In sovran splendor."

It is the genius of a true poet that here seizes upon the New Testament affirmations of the Headship of Christ, and weaves them together with dramatic impressiveness. A dialogue ensues in which Mary the Virgin and Joseph, with the children, sing of the Incarnation, a scene which Dean Stubbs truly characterizes as "the first dawning so to say in our literature of the Mystery Play and the sequent English drama."

[5] *The Christ of English Poetry*, p. 15.

"Indeed," he adds, "I think it is not too much to say that the sweet and tender grace, the humility and loving kindness of the Virgin, her maidenhood, her motherhood, as pictured in this poem of Cynewulf's, and in the pages of many another English poet down to Chaucer, became for the men of mediæval England the most vivid and beautiful Christian ideal that filled the minds of men after the image of Christ."[6]

Often the poem rises to great heights of dramatic fervor, as in the judgment scene, where a blood-red Cross is pictured standing on the Hill of Zion, and in the lurid light Christ turns to the Cross and pointing to himself hanging there, addresses the multitudes in the Valley of Decision:—

> "See now the deadly wounds they made of yore
> Upon my hands and e'en upon my feet—
> The gory wound, the gash upon my side,
> O how uneven between us two the reckoning."

At the end of the poem the poet pictures Heaven in exalted language:—

"There is angels' song bliss of the blessed,
There is the dear face of the Lord Eternal
To the blessed brighter than all the sun's beaming,
There is love of the loved ones, life without death's end:
Merry man's multitude, youth without age,
Glory of God's chivalry, health without pain,
Rest for right doers, rest without toil,
Day without darkness, bliss without bale,
Peace between friends, peace without jealousy,
Love that envieth not, in the union of the saints,
For the blessed in Heaven, nor hunger nor thirst,
Nor sleep, nor sickness, nor sun's heat,

[6] *The Christ of English Poetry*, pp. 19, 20.

Nor cold, nor care, but the happy company.
Fairest of all hosts shall ever enjoy
Their sovran's grace and glory with the King."[7]

If the beauty of this early English poem impresses us, we must not fail to realize that its beauty is the beauty of the Bible. Its imagery is that of the Gospels and the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, not without a strong admixture, of course, of Saxon and Celtic feeling. It is the product of a mind steeped in the thoughts and visions of the Word of God. Difficult as it is to trace in full the identity of Cynewulf, it is very clear that the hand that wrought with such fine literary workmanship to produce "Christ," "Elene," "Juliana," and "The Fates of the Apostles," the last-named including also "Andreas," had handled fondly the good Word of God, and had made it the norm and governor of his thought. Right well did this English poet of the long-ago declare, "God Himself unlocked the power of poetry in my breast."

[7] The extracts from the poem used in this chapter are taken from Dean Stubbs' chapter on Cynewulf in *The Christ of English Poetry*. Prof. A. S. Cook of Yale University has published a valuable edition of "The *Christ* of Cynewulf."

VII

THE FATHER OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

"The rising sun shall find the Bible in thy hands."
Old Monastic Rule.

THE eighth century was a brilliant period in English history. In that century the English centers of culture, especially in the north, reached the climax of their usefulness, and their influence extended to the continent of Europe.

It must be apparent to the student of these early centuries that the crystallizing of thought in the form of literature was profoundly affected by the body of literature that was found ready-to-hand in the Bible. Racial gift and temperament would, of course, have inspired the men of that day to write in any case. Nevertheless there can be no mistaking the stimulus offered to intellectual productiveness by the Bible. The raw material of genius was present in society: what the Bible did was to fertilize the genius of men and cause it to bring forth a characteristic literature.

This was the more remarkable because there was as yet no vernacular translation of the Scripture, although portions were early carried over into Anglo-Saxon versions. It is difficult for us in our age, when the printed page tends to stunt the memory, to realize the power of oral teaching in an age when men were hearers more than they were readers. Again at this point we remark upon the simple beginnings of litera-

ture, which are found not alone in the minds of cloistered scholars, but in the hearts of the common people, whose ears first tingle with the sound of strange and unwonted truth. Caedmon, who could not read Latin, must have depended for his knowledge of the Bible upon oral teaching.

We have seen how the early missioners drew the people to the sound of the Scripture. Indeed with all the accrued values of the printed page in the present day, the influence of oral instruction in the Bible ought not to be underestimated. The very sound of the Scripture, that is heard in the land from Sabbath to Sabbath in many pulpits, is an incalculable power for education in the speech and mental habits of the people. What this influence must have been in a time when ears were wide open, and nothing interfered with the entrance of the Word, can only be in part imagined.

By the time of the eighth century the hearing of the Scripture was well advanced. But this was not all. We have referred in a previous chapter to the work of the schools which was momentous in the civilization of the time. The best proof of their usefulness is found in the men that they produced. Great teachers and writers grew up in the intensive atmosphere of study that surrounded the northern schools. Men could not pore day after day over the pages of the Holy Word without experiencing a strange intellectual stimulus along with the spiritual uplift. With men of natural talent and ability the Bible exercised a spell of mental excitation. It broadened their horizons, furnished new subjects of thought, new materials for imagination. And withal it invested with new worth

and dignity all the work, however common, of men's hearts and hands. It is no wonder that devout monks in the schools gave themselves unremittingly to the work of illuminating manuscripts, and the preparation of rubrics and minuscules. The fine arts are seen to be germinating here in the work that men did on the form and appearance of the Bible.

Now and then there would arise men who were not content wtih adorning the outside of the Book. They must go much deeper and farther. They saw the relation of the Bible to human life in larger ways. It became to them a norm of thought and plan. They measured the universe by its rule: they applied its terms to things high and low. They were in fact early schoolmen, lacking in the profundity of later nominalists and realists, but cherishing the same scholastic conception of Holy Scripture.

It is an impressive fact that the Bible for many generations has contributed much to the making of scholars and teachers. No surer evidence can be adduced of the strength of the Book than is seen in its power to create scholarship. A weak book could not have exercised such a spell of literary creativeness. Even in the far-away schools of northern England there arose an embryonic scholarship that was steeped in Scripture. Gifted men brought their talents to God's altar, they dipped their pens in the well of God's Book, and wrote in terms thereof the lessons they had learned in philosophy and life.

The picture of the early English scholar is thus indissolubly associated with the Bible. We see him in fact as in a Biblical frame, and surrounded by a Biblical atmosphere. However far English-speaking

scholars and writers may travel into the world of material, and whatever independence of spiritual norms and sources they may seem to achieve, let them at least never forget the hole of the pit whence they were digged. The first scholars of the English race were frankly beholden to the Bible. It furnished them with spiritual and intellectual stimulus, and, in a time when literature was in its early stages, it provided them with literary forms and models.

As we write these words there is one historic figure that keeps rising before us. This is the figure of Baeda, or the Venerable Bede, whom Edmund Burke called "the father of English learning." In Bede is seen the finest flower of the monastic institutions of northern England, and the noblest product of their Biblical discipline. To have produced such a character and such a scholar as the Venerable Bede is in itself a sufficient vindication of the schools, and, in particular, of the Biblical basis upon which they were founded. One whom a sober historian could describe as "the father of our national education," was a rich inheritance for all time of the Bible schools of the eighth century.

Born near Wearmouth in the year 673, Bede became a pupil in Benedict Biscop's monastery at Jarrow. There he spent his life in quiet study of the Bible and other books, and in writing his more than forty volumes of history, Biblical commentary, biography, science and poetry. Probably the longest journey he ever took was from Jarrow to York. "I have passed my whole life in the same convent," he writes, "have studied Holy Writ with all diligence, and, along with my strict attendance on monastic rule and the daily

singing, have ever deemed it a sweet occupation to teach, to learn, or to write."

His greatest work was his *Ecclesiastical History,* containing the story of the English church from the days when Augustine and his monks landed at Ebbsfleet down almost to the day of his death. The interesting story of Caedmon's call to write was here fortunately preserved for us. It was this monumental work in Latin, which was later translated into the popular language by no less a person than Alfred the Great, that gave the Venerable Bede his proudest title —"the father of English history."

If Caedmon was the early Milton of the English race, and Cynewulf the early Tennyson or Browning, Bede was the early Ruskin, and his style, like that of Ruskin, has about it much of the stately charm of Biblical prose. He was indeed the first master of English prose, albeit he wrote for the most part in Latin.

"The quiet grandeur," says Green the historian, "of a life consecrated to knowledge, the tranquil pleasure that lies in learning and teaching and writing, dawned in fact for Englishmen in the story of Baeda."[1] It was he who gave to English literature a true sense of permanency. For the first time scholarship took a place never to be surrendered in English history, and in him "English literature strikes its roots."

Six hundred young men gathered about him in the monastery at Jarrow and his fame reached even to Rome, whither he was invited to come by the Pope who desired to consult with him. He was in touch with all the learning of his day, and the books that

[1] *Short History of the English People,* Chapter I, Section IV.

Biscop and Wilfrid brought from the continent and stored in the northern monasteries were open to him. He quotes with freedom from Greek and Latin writers, and although he was a writer of prose, the spell of Vergil fell upon him, and on occasions he ventured to unrein his fancy in verse. Like many another poet he yielded, notwithstanding his monastic habit, to the touch of the seasons and wrote an eclogue on the approach of spring!

Bede's studies were encyclopedic in character, embracing all that the world then knew about astronomy, meteorology, physics, music, philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic and medicine. Nevertheless his studies left him, as one has said, "in heart a simple Englishman." "He loved his own English tongue: he was skilled in English song: his last work was a translation into English of the Gospel of St. John, and almost the last words that broke from his lips were some English rimes upon death." (Green).

The genius of Bede was inspired and informed by constant study of the Scripture. It is not too much to say that the Old Testament helped to make him an historian: and the incidents, biographies and human pictures of the Bible must have had much to do in developing what the historian has described as "his own exquisite faculty of story-telling."[2]

In a letter to Cuthwine, Bede's devoted pupil, Cuthbert tells the story of his master's last labors, wherein we see England's first great scholar bending above the pages of Holy Writ. He was engaged upon an English translation of the Gospel of St. John, when great

[2] Some of Bede's best scenes have often been rendered in English verse. See Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets.*

weakness seized him. He continued his lectures and his writing however, until it was apparent to all that the end was near. Now and again his voice broke out in English song. "There is still a chapter wanting," said his scribe to him, "and it is hard for thee to write." "It is easily done," he replied. "Take thy pen and write quickly."

Toward evening of the last day—it was Ascension Day—the scribe announced, "There is yet one sentence unwritten, dear Master." "Write quickly," said the dying man. "It is finished now," said the scribe. "Yes," said Bede, "it is all finished now," and with his head supported on the arms of his scholars, his failing voice chanting the solemn "Glory to God," the Venerable Bede passed quietly away on Wednesday the twenty-seventh of May in the year 735.

His English work has not survived for us—a loss for which the Danish invaders of Northumbria were doubtless responsible. But nothing can extract from English history and literature the influence of this Bible-saturated scholar.

Imagination lingers fondly over the scene of the Monk of Jarrow's last hours. That he expired while transcribing in English words the apostle John's immortal story of the world's Savior was a prophecy of the inherent spiritual power of English literature. Wordsworth writes in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*:—

> "Sublime Recluse!
> The recreant soul, that dares to shun the debt
> Imposed on human kind, must first forget
> Thy diligence, thy unrelaxing use
> Of a long life; and, in the hour of death,
> The last dear service of thy passing breath."

VIII

THE TEACHER OF EUROPE

*"I * * * am busied under the shelter of St. Martin's in bestowing upon many of my pupils the honey of the Holy Scriptures."*

From Alcuin's letter to Charlemagne.

IT is a remarkable fact that when intellectual darkness had fallen upon western Europe and even Rome had become barbarian, the lamp of learning was still kept alight in Britain and Ireland. How the light was brought back to the continent is an interesting story—a story that is not unrelated to the influence of the Bible and the making of literature in England and elsewhere.

Students distinguish three revivals of learning in western Europe, increasing steadily in strength from first to last. The first of these took place under Charles the Great and Alcuin of York. The second restoration grew out of the influence of scholasticism and resulted in the founding of the universities. The third movement of restoration called the Renaissance was so profound and far-reaching as to obtain for itself the distinctive title—The Revival of Learning. The intellectual overturning which took place in this period was truly constructive of a new world both in education and religion.

The first of these movements was in a sense the

most important, even as it was the most unique. Grave issues hinged upon it, and the future culture of Europe lay in its lap. If it had not been for Alcuin, the English scholar whom Charlemagne called to be his minister of education, and who nourished the intellectual life of western Europe, not only in the Palace School, but also in monasteries and cathedrals throughout the Frankish kingdom, it is probable that the darkness would have deepened in western Europe, and the age of the universities would never have dawned.[1]

To trace the beginnings of the Carolingian school with its prolonged influence in European culture, we must return to the schools of Northumbria in England.

Alcuin was born near the old Roman town of York probably in the year 735, the very year in which the Venerable Bede died. The twin monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow was founded by Benedict Biscop, whose greatest pupil, as we have seen, was Bede. There Bede had access to the rich store of books which Benedict brought from Rome and Vienna. Bede had a friend Egbert who became Archbishop of York in 732. Egbert founded there a cathedral school and established within it a valuable library. He was succeeded by Aelbert or Ethelbert. In this school at York Alcuin was trained, unconscious of the great work that lay before him as the teacher of Europe.[2]

[1] *Alcuin and the Rise of the Christian Schools,* pp. 1-3, Professor Andrew F. West.

[2] The words of Bishop Stubbs already quoted on another page are worth quoting again at this point. "It may be said," he writes, "that the civilization and learning of the eighth

The education he received included the liberal arts, but more than all it provided for constant study of the Scripture. The memorizing of Latin Psalms was one of his earliest disciplines. His letters reveal his current familiarity with the Bible.[3]

In his poem "On the Saints of the Church at York," where—

> "the Euboric scholars felt the rule
> Of Master Aelbert, teaching in the school,"

he proceeds to give a description of the studies pursued.

> "To some he made the grammar understood
> And poured on others rhetoric's copious flood."

And so on through the list of the liberal studies of the day.

> "Then, last and best, he opened up to view
> The depths of Holy Scripture, Old and New.
> Was any youth in studies well approved,
> Then him the Master cherished, taught, and loved;
> And thus the double knowledge he conferred
> Of liberal studies and the Holy Word."

In due time Alcuin was called to be the master of the school, and later he took charge of the cathedral library at York which was then widely famed for its riches. In one of his journeys to Italy he met Charles the Great, and thus began an acquaintance which had

century rested on the monastery which he (Biscop) founded, which produced Bede, and through him, the school of York, Alcuin, and the Carolingian school, on which the culture of the Middle Ages was based." See *Dictionary of Christian Biography,* Vol. I, p. 309.

[3] See Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature,* article on Alcuin.

much to do with the future of education in Europe. At a second meeting with Charles Alcuin was invited to leave England and come to Frankland as the prime minister of education in the Frankish kingdom.

Surely Providence must have been directing the turn of events that took this Bible-trained scholar from England to rule over Charlemagne's Palace School at Aachen. The year was 782. It would be too much to say that the darkness of western Europe fled at the approach of Alcuin. What the historians do not hesitate to say is that learning returned to Europe when Alcuin left the monastic school at York and undertook the work of education on the continent.

Learning was in a sorry state in Frankland upon Alcuin's arrival. The monastic and cathedral schools had been abandoned, and in many instances the monasteries had been given to royal favorites. When he died in 804 he left behind him, not only a royal circle that had been refined by contact with the liberal arts and the Holy Scripture, but also a company of trained scholars, such as Theodulf, Bishop of Orleans, the adviser of Lewis who succeeded Charles the Great; Arno, Archbishop of Salzburg; Fridugis, his favorite pupil, who succeeded him as head of the monastery and school at Tours; and the greatest of his pupils, the young Rabanus Maurus, who even more than his master deserves the title of teacher of Europe. Through those whom he trained Alcuin's influence lived after him. It was such as these, receiving their inspiration from the scholar of York, who kept learning alive in monasteries and cathedrals in the difficult days that followed, until the new age of the universities dawned in Europe.

When Charles the Great in the year 800 took his journey to Rome, a journey which ended for him so gloriously, he invited his minister of education to accompany him. But Alcuin, beginning to feel the burden of age and of his assiduous toil in teaching and writing, could not undertake the journey. Although Alcuin was not present when on Christmas Day in St. Peter's in Rome the Pope suddenly set a crown upon the head of Charlemagne and saluted him as "Carolus Augustus, Emperor of the Romans," it is certain that the devout teacher must have rejoiced in the privilege he had exercised of pouring "the honey of the Holy Scriptures" into the very fountain-head of European culture.

Professor West has endeavored in his interesting and valuable study of Alcuin to reproduce the picture of the Palace School at Aachen.[4] Alcuin the master sits in the midst of his royal pupils. Charles himself, who received the Biblical name of David, is the foremost of all the scholars. His queen Liutgard is there, "resplendent in mind and pious in heart." There are also present Gisela, one of the four sisters of Charles, and his three sons, Charles, Pepin and Lewis, the last-named destined to succeed his father as "Lewis the Pious." Two daughters of the king were members of the school, "the fair-haired princess Rotrud and her gentler sister Gisela," besides his son-in-law, Angilbert, and his cousins, Adelhard and Wala, with their sister, Gundrada. Others there were not of the royal family, such as Einhard, afterward the biographer of Charles, Riculf, later Archbishop of Mayence, Alcuin's friend Arno, who became Archbishop

[4] *Alcuin and the Rise of the Christian Schools*, pp. 42-48.

of Salzburg, and Theodulf, afterward Archbishop of Orleans. In addition to these there were the three scholars who had followed him from York—Witzo, Fridugis and Sigulf. Altogether it was an attractive and influential group, scarcely more than a university in embryo, yet a sure foretoken of the greater intellectual life of Europe.

In all his teaching Alcuin sought to ennoble knowledge with "the mastership of Christ the Lord." That, he said, "would surpass all the wisdom of the studies of the Academy;" it would be "enriched beyond this with the sevenfold plenitude of the Holy Spirit."

The influence of such training, saturated as it was with Scriptural thought and motive, is best seen in the historic capitulary which Charles issued in 787, which has been called "the first general charter of education for the Middle Ages." It was a charge to the abbots and others to give assiduous attention to the study of letters. The King reproves their illiteracy and bids them to honor God by correct speech, enforcing his exhortation by the Scripture, "By thine own words shalt thou be justified or condemned." "We exhort you therefore not only not to neglect the study of letters, but to apply yourselves thereto with perseverance and with that humility which is well pleasing to God; so that you may be able to penetrate with greater ease and certainty the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures."

It is at least instructive to observe how the motives of the new learning fostered by the great Charlemagne were inextricably bound up with the study of the Bible. The scholar of York—Bible-lover that he was—did his work well in instilling in the mind of such a

maker of history as Charles the Great the love of the Holy Book.

The latter years of Alcuin's life until his death in 804 were spent at Tours, where he was abbot of the monastery, which by his efforts became a new center of light and learning. It was here that he wrote his famous letter to Charles in which he contrasted "the honey of the Holy Scriptures" with "the old wine of the ancient disciplines" and "the apples of grammatical subtlety." The letter is full of references to the Bible which he uses aptly to enforce his points.

In the Scriptorium at Tours Alcuin kept the monks busy in copying manuscripts and ornamenting after the manner of the time. One served as reader while others copied what they heard. It was the only publishing house that was possible in that day: and Alcuin and his monks felt that they were rendering an important service by preserving valuable manuscripts and thus saving learning from perishing in Europe. In Alcuin's view it was a deeply sacred office to transcribe the Scripture and the writings of holy men. No trifler's hand should deal with such a task. "Writing books is better than planting vines," so ran one of his aphorisms; "for he who plants a vine serves his belly, but he who writes a book serves his soul."

It was the Bible more than all else that informed the studies, the writing, and all the work of Alcuin. Although he had classic tastes—at one time he was himself something of a Vergilian—he came later to feel that the poetry of the Bible was all-sufficient. "Oh! that the four Gospels and not the twelve Æneids might fill your thoughts," he wrote to an archbishop. When he would send a royal present to

his patron Charlemagne he could think of nothing so suitable as a beautifully written copy of the four Gospels. Although he wrote on many topics it was the Bible that furnished the rule of his life and the model of his writing. The seven arts in his view were only "necessary ascents to the higher wisdom of the Scriptures."

Much of his work was done outside of England, and with the Latin language as an instrument. Nevertheless the fountain-head was England, and we cannot but feel that his work aided not a little in giving to English literature its Biblical cast and character.

IX

KING ALFRED AND THE BIBLE

"Aelfred mec heht gewyrcan," (*Alfred ordered me made*). Inscription on an antique jewel in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.

IN previous chapters we have seen how powerful the Bible was, even in an age when literature as we conceive of the term was a far-away reality, in informing the thought of the people, and preparing them, by the Biblical atmosphere that was being created, for the growth of literature. We have seen how the Bible influenced such men as Caedmon and Cynewulf in what may fairly be regarded as the beginnings of English literature. And we have also seen what a powerful factor the Bible was in the lives of such scholars as Bede and Alcuin who, though their work was done mostly in Latin, gave incalculable aid in preparing for the birth of a real national literature.

It is now our task to consider the actual beginnings of such a national literature, and to point out how, in the Providence of God, the man who had most to do with laying its foundations was a passionate lover of the Word of God. For it is to be remembered that, notwithstanding occasional outbursts of native genius, notwithstanding the abundant labors of the monasteries in transcribing and preserving manuscripts, and notwithstanding some beginnings at vernacular trans-

lations, there was as yet nothing approaching a national literature.[1] With such exceptions as have been mentioned the thaldrom of the Latin language was still secure. In Italy Latin was spoken down to the thirteenth century. St. Anthony of Padua (d. 1231) preached in Latin and the people understood him.[2] In England the monasteries down to the time of Alfred had apparently not begun to think of giving up their beloved Latin. We have seen that the Venerable Bede died over the last sentences of the Gospel of John which he translated into English. But there was as yet no general movement toward creating a body of English writing.

It was Alfred the Great who opened the way for the creation of a true literature of the English people. Alfred came to the West Saxon throne in the year 871, and reigned until his death in 901. His glory can never fade from English history. Historians vie with one another in depicting the strength of his character, and the value of his accomplishments. There is scarce a discordant note. Asser, whom Alfred called from Wales to live at the court, gives a remarkable tribute to his royal patron. Besides giving assiduous atten-

[1] "At this time, as far as we can judge, there can only have been one, or at most two books in the English language—the long poem by Caedmon about the creation of the world, etc., and the poem of Beowulf about warriors and fiery dragons. There were many English ballads and songs, but whether these were written down I do not know. There was no book of history, not even English history: no book of geography, no religious books, no philosophy. Bede, who had written so many books, had written them all in Latin." *Lectures on the History of England,* by M. J. Guest, Lect. 9.

[2] *The Renaissance,* Philip Schaff, p. 10.

tion to the government, as well as to the pursuits and industries of the people, he continued "to recite the Saxon books, and especially to learn by heart the Saxon poems, and to make others learn them: he never desisted from studying most diligently to the best of his ability: he attended the mass and other daily services of religion: he was frequent in psalm-singing and prayer: he bestowed alms and largesses on both natives and foreigners of all countries: he was affable and pleasant to all, and curiously eager to investigate things unknown." This picture drawn by a contemporary hand presents a royal figure indeed.

In the century after his death Florence of Worcester describes him as "that famous, warlike, victorious king: the zealous protector of widows, scholars, orphans and the poor; skilled in the Saxon poets; affable and liberal to all; endowed with prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance; most patient under the infirmity which he daily suffered; a most stern inquisitor in executing justice; vigilant and devoted in the service of God."

But it was left to modern historians to paint the most remarkable of all pictures of Alfred. Green calls him, "the noblest of English rulers," and declares that his moral grandeur lifts him to the level of the world's greatest men. He "found time amidst the cares of state for the daily duties of religion, for converse with strangers, for study and translation, for learning poems by heart, for planning buildings and instructing craftsmen in gold-work, for teaching even falconers and dog-keepers their business."[3]

[3] *A Short History of the English People,* Chapter I, Section V.

Freeman draws even a more impressive portrait of the king. He is the most perfect character in history, "to whose character romance has done no more than justice, and who appears in exactly the same light in history and in fable." The poet Wordsworth describes him as "Lord of the harp and liberating spear."

Circumstances made him a warrior, but nature made him a lover of literature. Tradition relates that when he was a mere lad, his mother showed him and his brother a book of poetry, saying to them, "Whichever of you shall soonest learn this volume shall have it for his own." Alfred mastered the book, and thus his love of literature began. It seemed for a time that his task was to be wholly a military one, for the ravaging Northmen were pressing closer and closer to the heart of England. Northumberland was the first to suffer; and the precious institutions that had been built up in the north fell under the ruthless hand of the invader. Next the Danes entered Mercia and East Anglia, and at length they reached Wessex where Ethelred and his brother Alfred disputed their progress. The task of resistance was soon left to Alfred alone upon the death of his brother, and although the English suffered many things and the loss of much territory, "the strong heart of the most renowned of Englishmen, the saint, the scholar, the hero, and the lawgiver, carried his people safely through this most terrible of dangers."[4]

A heart less stout than Alfred's would have quailed before the conditions that prevailed after the Danish invasions. Towns were laid waste and pillaged. Lon-

[4] *History of the Norman Conquest,* E. A. Freeman, Chapter II.

don itself had suffered severely. The monasteries and schools had been destroyed, and ignorance and insecurity were widespread. The monastery of Jarrow, where the Venerable Bede wrote his *Ecclesiastical History,* was ravished. It is supposed that his English translation of the Gospel of John was lost in the Danish invasion. The monastery of Whitby, which saw the earliest beginnings of English song in Caedmon's vision, was only temporarily saved by the courage of the monks.[5] A few years of lawlessness during the foreign invasions had sufficed to shatter the foundations of society, and to destroy such social and religious institutions as had grown up under the favoring influence of Christianity. Learning had suffered a deathblow, and there were few persons left who had either vision or courage to press forward to better things. The intellectual brilliancy of the eighth century in England was in the ninth century reduced to the dimness of a rushlight, with imminent danger indeed of being extinguished altogether.

Happily King Alfred was able to divine with a true instinct the needs of society in his day. Having saved England from the power of the invader he did not stop with this. He had the soul of a poet as well as the mind and heart of a king: and he saw in imagination the English people turning back again to religion and education.

If he could but inspire them with love for their own —their own language and song, their own religious history and mission—he conceived that England might become a new nation. It is this vision of his for his

[5] *A History of English Literature,* William V. Moody and Robert M. Lovett, p. 18.

people that entitles him to be called Alfred the Great, far more even than his military exploits. He was himself a passionate lover of the old songs of his race. Many of them he had learned by heart. And he longed for the day when once more the sound of English song and ballad should be heard in the land. In this instinct of his for popular education Alfred was the forerunner of a long line of eminent educationists, moralists, and reformers, who have clearly understood that the healing of nations must begin invariably at the fountain-head of popular feeling and emotion. With King Alfred the motive was deeply religious. He desired to do his people good spiritually, and in all his plans for popular education he kept his own mind free from materialistic lapses. It was the music of the Psalms that comforted his own heart, and it was nothing less than this consolation that constituted his ambition for the people.

The familiar story of Alfred's Note-Book indicates what a genius he had for grasping and adapting the material that was at hand. "He carried in his bosom," says Green, "a little hand-book in which he jotted down things as they struck him, now a bit of family genealogy, now a prayer, now a story such as that of Bishop Ealdhelm singing sacred songs on the bridge."[6] It is Marcus Aurelius come back again who writes thus reflectively in his hand-book: "Desirest thou power? But thou shalt never obtain it without sorrows—sorrows from strange folk, and yet keener sorrows from thine own kindred."

That Alfred studied the situation carefully is re-

[6] *A Short History of the English People,* Chapter I, Section V.

vealed in the Preface to his English version of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. He recalls with interest the former times when peace and prosperity abounded in England with learning and religion. Then foreigners came to England in search of wisdom. "The churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and books." But now it would be necessary to go to the Continent to obtain learning. England's light had almost gone out. "There were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English, or translate a letter from Latin into English; and I believe there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few that I cannot remember a single one south of the Thames when I came to the throne." To Alfred it seemed a strange thing that "the good and wise men, who were formerly all over England, and had perfectly learned all the books, did not wish to translate them into their own language."[7] It was, he thought, a fatal mistake to have kept the treasures of religion and literature locked up in a language other than that of the people. "They did not think that men would ever be so careless, and that learning would so decay: therefore they abstained from translating, and they trusted that the wisdom in this land might increase with our knowledge of languages." But alas! They had not reckoned with the Danish marauders. It is one of the sad reflections of history, to consider what untold literary values may have disappeared in England with the coming of the ravishing Northmen. If only men had realized the value of vernacular translations—or even

[7] See Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*, Alfred the Great. Vol. I, pp. 393, 394.

of oral transcripts—their memory might have served a later generation.

The king resolved to do what he could to furnish a remedy. He would open up to the people in their own language the treasures which had heretofore been confined to the clergy. He would lay the foundations of a national literature in England. It is impossible that Alfred should have measured the full meaning of his decision; he builded better than he knew. In all history there have been few resolutions of royalty that have meant so much for human welfare as did Alfred's determination to give to the English people books written in their own language.

The lapse of centuries does not dim the astonishment with which men still regard the rapid reconstructive work of this good royal hand. He founded monasteries and schools, and restored the waste places. He opened a school in his own court for his own children and the children of his nobles. He gave attention to law, justice, religion, education and industry. He looked after the training of the clergy, for he realized that the people could not be expected to rise above the level of their teachers. He set the people to reciting the Saxon books, and to learning the Saxon poems. In all this he himself set the example. His ambition was that every free-born youth who could do so should "abide at his book till he can well understand English writing."

Alfred surrounded himself too with such helpers as were available, summoning them from other parts. It is said that France and Germany contributed to his staff of workers. The famous Bishop Asser, whose fervent eulogy of his royal patron must be received

with caution, came from Wales. Over the abbey which Alfred founded at Winchester a scholar named Grimbold presided. There were such as "Plegmund, my archbishop, and Asser, my bishop, and Grimbold, my mass-priest, and John, my mass-priest."[8]

In all his work the Bible occupied a large place. At the head of his Laws he placed a copy of the Ten Commandments, to which he added other regulations of the Mosaic Code. And this, be it remembered, was done not in Latin, but in the language of the common people. Like other devout souls before him, he recognized the value of the Psalter as an aid in the promotion of religious feeling. Therefore it is said that he set about a translation of the Psalms, a work that was never completed.[9] It is believed too that it was in Alfred's time, or soon after, that the earliest Anglo-Saxon Gospels were produced. It was probably during his reign that the earliest English poems, those of Caedmon and Cynewulf, were brought from Northumbria and put in the West-Saxon form in which we have them.[10] Thus, says a historian, "when they had a time of 'stillness' the king and his learned friends set to work and translated books into English; and Alfred, who was as modest and candid as he was wise, put into the preface of one of his translations that he hoped if any one knew Latin better than he

[8] King Alfred's Preface to the Version of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care.*

[9] "There is no known copy of this work in existence, though there is a manuscript in the British Museum which carries the name 'King Alfred's Psalter.'" *The Ancestry of Our English Bible,* Prof. Ira M. Price, p. 212.

[10] *A History of English Literature,* Moody and Lovett, p. 18.

did, that he would not blame him, for he could but do according to his ability."[11]

It is difficult for us to realize what a barrier of language Alfred had to meet. He met the difficulty boldly. Unconsciously he created a new literature. His four major translations, two of which are Biblical in their motive and flavor, are an everlasting monument to his devotion to his people, and his ambition to furnish them with a literature of their own. These are Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care,* Boethius' *Consolations of Philosophy,* two manuscripts of which still exist, *The History of the World,* by Orosius the Spanish priest, which is preserved in the Cotton manuscripts in the British Museum, and, most important of all, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.* There were other minor translations in prose and verse, such as versions of the Latin fables; and there was also his Note-Book, which reveals as nothing else could do his habit of thought. It was under his hand, too, that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which had as its model the Hebrew Chronicles, was elaborated and made into a national history. "It is when it reaches the reign of Alfred that the Chronicle suddenly widens into the vigorous narrative, full of life and originality, that marks the gift of a new power to the English tongue." (Green.) We find in this early English Chronicle the same "freshness of the elder world" that we are always aware of in the stories and even the records of the Old Testament.[12]

Thus Alfred broke down the Latin barrier and

[11] *Lectures on the History of England,* M. J. Guest, Lect. 9.

[12] See *The Bible as English Literature,* Prof. J. H. Gardiner, p. 37.

brought literature to the people in their own tongue. He gave a definite Biblical stamp to the thought and literature of the English people which passed on into later years. Says Dr. F. A. March, an acknowledged authority on the life and literature of the Anglo-Saxons, "Well he loved God's men and God's Word. He loved men of learning and brought them about him from far countries. He loved his people, their land, and speech, and old ballads, and Bible songs, and he was the preserver of the literature and language, as well as the liberties and laws, of the Anglo-Saxons."[13]

The king might write down his laws for the people, but familiar as he was with the Bible, he could not keep from presenting the background of human institutions in the Mosaic laws, with their fuller interpretation in Christ and the apostles. He might translate the *Consolations* of the Roman Senator Boethius, "the most remarkable literary effort of the declining days of the Roman Empire," but he must needs recast it and introduce many Christian precepts and allusions which are not found in the original.

Thus we see that the actual beginnings of a national literature in England were interfused with the spirit and form of the Word of God. Alfred poured the ingredient of Scripture into the mold in the very making of English literature. Not only did he create English literature; he gave it a certain Biblical set and type. Not only did he render a matchless service to the English people by placing "by the side of Anglo-Saxon poetry—consisting of two great poems, Caedmon's great song of the 'Creation,' and Cynewulf's 'Nativity and Life of Christ,' and the unwritten bal-

[13] *Anglo-Saxon Reader,* Notes, p. 78.

lads passed from lip to lip—four immense translations from Latin into Anglo-Saxon prose, which raised English from a mere spoken dialect to a true language;"[14] but he grounded English thought and literature in the Bible. When he commanded "that no man take the clasp from the book or the book from the minster,"[15] he united in sentiment at least the destiny of English literature with the Holy Bible.

It was a service scarcely ever paralleled in the history of nations, and one that sufficiently vindicates the title that he has always worn—Alfred the Great.

[14] Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature,* Vol. I, p. 392.

[15] From Alfred's Preface to the Version of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care.*

X

THE HOLY GRAIL

"Some men say yet that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesus into another place."—Sir Thomas Malory.

LOOKING back from the death of Alfred in the year 901 through three centuries to the landing of Augustine and his monks, who brought the precious gift of the Holy Scripture to England, one is compelled to reflect upon the tardy and meager beginnings of literature. At best it is but a tiny rivulet that might at any time be almost lost to view.

Yet when the difficulties that beset the growth of a true vernacular literature are remembered, a feeling of astonishmnt at the progress made soon gains ground. In all these early centuries there was nothing that can even faintly be described as a reading public. Even if there had been, the medium of communication would have proved inadequate to reach the public. However busy the pens of copyists might be, they could not in the nature of the case furnish a community with reading matter. Moreover the Latin language, although it was a wonderful preserver and purveyor of thought, was nevertheless a barrier in the way of popular education. It kept learning and literature for the most part in the hands of the learned classes.

To offset this, however, there was the work of preachers and minstrels who approached the people in their own language, and did much to kindle in the popular mind the love of literature. We have seen also how, beginning with the cowherd Caedmon, and continuing down to King Alfred, there were all along those who broke the barrier of the Latin tongue and delivered their messages in words that were level to the understanding of the people.

In all this period it was the church with its precious Book in hand that promoted the growth of literature. It was in the church schools that literature first flourished under the fostering care of men whose minds were steeped in Scripture. If the light of learning shone brightly in England during the eighth century, when darkness threatened the continent, it is not to be forgotten that it was the monasteries that gave protection to the light—it was the monks who toiled faithfully to perpetuate learning in the land. Such literature as was reproduced or created anew in these church houses had of necessity the stamp of Scripture upon it. It was shaped by the hands of men who were accustomed to the touch of the sacred parchments. The Scriptoria or writing-rooms of the monasteries, where Latin works were copied and illuminated, where the lives of saints were compiled, where records of past history and of current events were kept, and where other forms of literature were essayed—these early literary workshops must have been redolent with the perfume of the Word of God. Not only was literature preserved in this atmosphere, but literary revivals were fostered by the monastic institutions. It cannot be doubted that the Book which

they so highly prized, over whose pages devoted copyists spent years of labor, was a constant stimulus to the making of books.

It is not a very far cry from the time of Alfred to the Norman Conquest, an event which re-shaped the destiny of England, and furnished vast and new material for the making of literature. The interval was not prolific in literary workmanship, notwithstanding the impulse given to education by Alfred the Great. The Danes would not surrender their hopes of a conquered England: King Cnut must yet come. Even this foreigner of rude world stock was inspired by the Christian song of England. Hearing the monks singing through the open windows of a monastery as his boat went by, Cnut himself broke forth in poetic strain:—

"Merrily sang the monks in Ely,
When Cnut the King rode by;
Row, Knights, near the land,
And hear ye the monks' song."

Barren as the period is there are nevertheless names that are starred in the history of the time as lovers of the Word of God and promoters of literature. Such an one is Saint Dunstan, who is quite as renowned for his ability in managing men and affairs as for his ascetic sanctity—"first in the line of ecclesiastical statesmen who counted among them Lanfranc and Wolsey, and ended in Laud." (Green.) Early inspired by the books that he found in the monastery at Glastonbury, he gave himself to a life of study. Literature both sacred and profane became his passion, and to this love of his heart he added the kindred arts of music, painting and designing; and his influence was

strongly felt in the literary revival that took place in the reign of King Edgar. Dunstan took up the educational work of Alfred the Great and sought to promote learning and literature in the realm. It is Dunstan's harp on the wall, that gave forth tones without mortal touch, that has fascinated the minds of succeeding generations more even than his achievements as an educator and statesman. The tradition is at least valuable as illustrating the profound relation of religion to the fine arts.

Such writings as have come down to us from the old England preceding the conquest bear almost invariably the marks of Biblical influence. Professor Cook of Yale University has rendered a useful service to scholars by compiling the Biblical quotations to be found in old English prose writers.[1] The effect is to deepen our impression of the active influence of the Bible upon our early writers.

An excellent illustration is found in the latter part of the tenth century in the case of Aelfric whose sermons or Homilies are to be regarded as literature because of a certain picturesqueness and fervor which characterize them. It is Aelfric who has left us a unique and forcible exhortation upon "Reading the Scriptures." "Whoever," he says, "would be one with God must often pray, and often read the Holy Scriptures. For when we pray we speak to God; and when we read the Bible God speaks to us." "Aelfric's is the last great name," says Morley, "in the story of our literature before the Conquest." His style is described

[1] *Biblical Quotations in Old English Prose Writers,* Albert S. Cook, Professor of the English Language and Literature in Yale University.

as "lucid, fluent, forcible, and of graceful finish," a verdict that is somewhat surprising in view of the prevailing idea of the Anglo-Saxon language as too rugged for any fineness and lightness of touch. Writing of Aelfric's style Earle says: "The English of these Homilies is splendid: indeed, we may confidently say that here English appears fully qualified to be the medium of the highest learning."

Besides his *Homilies* and *Lives of the Saints*, Aelfric prepared an English grammar, a Latin dictionary, and a *Colloquium*, the last designed to teach boys to speak Latin correctly. Even this Colloquy contains some references to the Bible.[2] He made Anglo-Saxon versions of the books of the Pentateuch, and also of Joshua, Judges, Esther, Job, part of Kings, and the books of Judith and the Maccabees, thus taking his place early in the long line of devoted scholars who have translated the Scripture into English, and have thereby served to sweeten the wells of English thought and literature. Aelfric's life extended probably within a single generation's reach of the Conqueror.

With the coming of the Normans a new and powerful influence entered into the making of English literature. The Normans or Northmen were of the same rude stock that had already harassed England in the days of King Alfred, but they had mellowed during several generations under southern sunshine. They had adopted the Christian faith, and with their own rugged love of poetry had embraced the softer

[2] See *Biblical Quotations*, Prof. Cook, p. 127. See also *in extenso* quotations from the Bible in Aelfric's Versions of St. Basil's *Hexameron* and *Admonitio ad Filium Spiritualem* and his *Homilies* and *Lives of the Saints*.

cadences of France. They were most hospitable to new ideas and influences. Thus when Lanfranc came from Italy he was warmly received in Normandy and established at Bec a school that became, a historian affirms, "the most famous school of Christendom." This school gave to England not only Lanfranc himself, but even a greater scholar Anselm, the earliest of the schoolmen, both of whom pursued their thinking under the spell of God's Word.

It cannot be stated that the Normans brought much literature with them to England, but they brought the capacity for literature. In a sense they came singing to the conquest, for the King's minstrel Taillefer, singing as he fought and as he died, was a forerunner of a new age of literature. It has been picturesquely said that "England was conquered to the music of verse and settled to the sound of the harp." (Stopford Brooke.) One can already hear in the Song of Roland, which inspired the Norman knights to fight, the prelude of that great chorus of song which was soon to fill the throats of trouvères, troubadours, jongleurs and minnesingers in France and Germany. When the amalgamation of conquered and conqueror was complete, there had been produced a new people of composite strength and promise, in whose hands was a new and wonderful instrument of expression—the English language.

The Normans brought with them "the vitalizing breath of song, the fresh and youthful spirit of romance." A new feeling manifests itself in English literature, and a new and fascinating mode of expression begins to appear. Troubadour and trouvère were added to English life, and Norman-French *chansons*

were heard in the castles and on the highways. A romantic spirit was in the land, and the way would soon be opened for Langland, Chaucer, Shakespeare and all the great immortals down to Tennyson, who have sung in idealistic strain the old romance of the mingled blood of Saxon, Celt and Norman.

It is not necessary for our purpose to undertake here a discussion of the vast changes that came into English society with the Norman Conquest. Every student knows that these changes, registered in the language and customs of the people, are incalculable.

We are interested especially in the inquiry as to the influence of the Bible upon this outburst of the romantic spirit. The Normans were Christians: they were in fact among the first to establish the institutions of Christian chivalry. To such a people with their mingled temper of heroism and poetry the Bible would make a strong appeal. Its poetry, its lofty idealism, its abundant material for imagination, would find in the genius of the conquerors a field ready for cultivation.

This is best seen in the growth of the Arthurian legend, or as it is later known, the romance of King Arthur's Round Table and the Holy Grail. For it was in the period immediately following the Norman Conquest that the old Celtic romances were taken up and given new life and color and a permanent place in English literature. The early history of the Arthurian romance is shrouded in obscurity. Many volumes have been devoted to diligent inquiry into the subject.[3] Apparently the romance is of Celtic origin,

[3] See a late and valuable book, *The Quest of the Holy Grail,* Miss Jessie L. Weston. Miss Weston abandons both the

starting either in Wales among the old Britons, driven thither by the Saxon invasion, or in Brittany among the Celts who had migrated across the channel. As the Greeks had their Homeric epic, the Romans their Æneid, the Teutonic people their Nibelungen Lied, the Spanish peoples their Song of the Cid, so also the Celts had their Arthurian romance, which through many changes and cycles passed at length into English life and literature as the national epic. "For nearly a thousand years the Arthurian legends, which lie at the basis of Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King,' have furnished unlimited material, not to English poets alone, but to the poets of all Christendom."[4]

In its native form it was an excellent seed-plot for Scriptural ideas, and, as might have been expected, the influence of the Bible became manifest in this cycle of national song as soon as a fair opportunity presented itself. Such an opportunity appeared after the Norman Conquest, when the spirit of Norman song entered into English thought. About the middle of the twelfth century Geoffrey, a monk at the Benedictine monastery at Monmouth, issued a *History of the Kings of Britain*, containing the story of King Arthur. Geoffrey has been called the first story-teller in England, albeit he termed his work "history," and his medium was Latin. What he did for the Welsh legends Washington Irving did hundreds of years

Christian and Folk-Lore theories of origin, and propounds what she terms "The Ritual Theory," which sees in the Grail tradition "the confused and fragmentary record of a special form of nature-worship," which was elevated to the dignity of a "mystery."

[4] See *The Arthurian Legends*, Richard Jones, in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*, Vol. II, p. 886.

later for the Knickerbocker tales. The publication of Geoffrey's *Historia* marked "an epoch in the literary history of Europe." As a result the Arthurian and Round Table romances were within a half century found in Italy and Germany, as well as in England and France. Back and forth the story went from England to the continent, sometimes in Latin, and again in French dress. Geoffrey's treatment "flushed the Celtic romances with color and filled them with new life," and prepared them to become the vehicle of Christian thought.

Just when the legend of the Holy Grail was adopted into the Arthurian romance cannot be definitely stated, but it is at this point that we discover the influence of the Bible in the shaping of literature. It was inevitable that it would leave a lasting impress upon the sensitive and plastic material of these old legends. It required only some master hand to mould and blend the spiritual ideals of the Scripture with the cruder conceptions of the Celtic legends. Quite naturally thus men read the Bible into this old cycle of stories. Many versions of the history of King Arthur appeared in different countries and everywhere went wandering minstrels chanting the fascinating story to the people. In France Chrestien de Troyes gave his version, which was the forerunner of Tennyson's "Idylls." In Germany Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote his "Parzival," which made possible Wagner's opera of "Parsifal" in our time.

It may be that the master hand needed was that of Walter Map in England, for it was he apparently who bound the Arthurian romances together, made important additions in the interest of religion, and "put the

soul of poetry and spirituality into the crude legends of King Arthur." Walter Map's work, however, was in Latin. It may be true that it was jealousy of the popularity of the legends of chivalry that induced the church to invent the story of the Sacred Dish or San Grael. However this may have been, we see the Bible vying with popular legend in the making of literature.

It was left to another—and he a most interesting figure—to put the matchless story into an English dress. This was the good poet-priest Layamon whose *Brut* appeared in the year 1205. His own account of how he journeyed far until he found three books to make the material of his own composition has stirred the hearts of generations of book-lovers. "Layamon laid down these books and turned the leaves: he beheld them lovingly: may the Lord be gracious to him! Pen he took with fingers and wrote a book-skin, and the true words set together and compressed the three books into one." One of the three books was Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and another was a French translation of Geoffrey's story of King Arthur by an Anglo-Norman poet named Wace. Layamon was the pioneer writer of English romance. It is interesting to observe that the same hand that touched the books of his day so lovingly and wove them so skilfully into romance in native dress, must also have known the power and spirit of the Bible. Indeed it is apparent that the Bible by this time, through the Christian legend of the Holy Grail, had laid a strong hand upon the Arthurian romances and made them tributary to a spiritual purpose. Thus transformed indeed, the old Celtic legend became an apologetic for the doctrine of the Divine Presence.

When Sir Thomas Malory wrote his *La Morte d'Arthur* about the middle of the fifteenth century, the preparation for Tennyson's great Christian poem, "The Idylls of the King," was complete. Tennyson, however, was not the only poet who yielded to the fascination of the old romance. The theme indeed has been widely used in English and German literature. Milton hesitated in choosing a theme for his major poem, whether to select the story of Paradise or the search for the Holy Grail. Wordsworth, Lord Lytton, Matthew Arnold, William Morris and Swinburne have all made use of the legend.

The American writer, James Russell Lowell, made a beautiful adaptation of the theme in "The Vision of Sir Launfal." Few finer examples of the influence of the Bible on literature can be given. The very spirit of Christ breathes in the poem. When, after sharing his crust with the leper and giving him to drink from the stream, Sir Launfal hears the words of Christ that "were shed softer than leaves from the pine":—

> "Not what we give, but what we share,—
> For the gift without the giver is bare;
> Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,—
> Himself, his hungry neighbor, and Me,"

we realize that the best thought of the New Testament has been echoed in literature.

The core of the old legend may belong to Celtic mythology, but its elaboration shows the effect of Biblical facts and Christian legend. Folk-lore might furnish valiant knights, but it was the Scripture that gave them their Christian temper and sent them forth in their quest for the divine life. The Arimathean's

sacred vessel, wherein he was reputed to have caught some of the blood that flowed from Christ's wounds, was only a convenient symbol that was grafted on to the old romance. Gifted men like Walter Map, Robert de Barron, the poet-priest Layamon, Malory, and later Tennyson and Lowell, inspired by the Scripture, sowed the seeds of their own imagination in the fertile soil of the past, producing a rich harvest in our literature. It is to say the least a remarkable tribute to the influence of Biblical thought that the poem which comes nearest to being the national epic of the English-speaking peoples, is bound up so closely both in sentiment and form with the material of the Christian Scripture.

XI

RELIGIOUS DRAMA

"The Christian drama, remodeled from century to century, was represented for four hundred years before immense multitudes; and is a unique phenomenon in the history of literature."—Jusserand.

IT is remarkable that in the early centuries of English history the Bible should have come so close to the daily life of the people. The obstacles were very great, and none greater than the barrier of language. Notwithstanding this, and the absence of means of circulation, the Bible gradually found its way into the heart of England.

There were numerous media of communication, such as liturgical services, pictures, ecclesiastical legends, and the vernacular homilies of priests and friars, by which popular knowledge of the Bible was fed. Such knowledge might be indirect and imperfect: it was none the less an influence in leavening the national life.[1]

There was still another means of bringing the Scripture to the attention of the people that was in wide use in the centuries before the advent of the printing press. This was the dramatic representation of Scrip-

[1] See *Illustrated History of English Literature*, Garnett and Gosse, Vol. I, p. 205.

ture scenes, incidents and teachings in the form of Mysteries, Miracle-Plays and Moralities, which flourished in western Europe from the tenth and eleventh centuries down to the dawn of modern times—indeed until the printing press, the versions, and the Protestant Reformation displaced them. It is on the whole such an interesting development of the popular mind, and, as Jusserand has said, such "a unique phenomenon in the history of literature," that we cannot pass it by in our survey of the conditions that gave to the Bible a profound influence in the making of English literature. "As to England, it was in the ruins and debris of the Miracle-Play and Morality that Elizabethan drama struck its deepest roots, and later drama owes more to these rude precursors than has been customarily observed or recognized."[2]

In the study of this early drama we may expect to meet much that is extravagant and fantastic. No one, however, can study attentively the process by which these plays were evolved without realizing that the Bible was in these centuries the very warp and woof of popular thought. The dramatization might be very grotesque and misleading—nevertheless it is clear that these Miracle-Plays were the far-away beginnings of a national drama and of a real dramatic literature.

It is needless to discuss the existence of the dramatic instinct in humanity. The evidences are too widespread and too convincing to be denied. What is not so commonly recognized is the connection between religion and drama. The old Greek drama was essentially a part of a religious celebration. Roman drama in like manner is said to have had a religious origin.

[2] *Elizabethan Drama*, Felix E. Schelling, Vol. I, p. 1.

The same is true also of Indian and Chinese drama. The Christian Church had found the drama hopelessly degenerate and therefore had suppressed it. It could not, however, suppress the dramatic tastes and instincts of the mind. These only awaited an opportunity for future expression.

Strange to relate it was the church itself that revived the drama for purposes of its own, after having once suppressed it. "Little as it may now bear traces of its origin, the theatre of England is the offspring of religious worship. Its cradle was upon the steps of the altar, and in the years of its struggling infancy it was nurtured by ecclesiasticism and fostered by clerical care."[3]

It was the church's own consciousness of a threatened failure that gave birth to mediæval religious drama. Just as Aldhelm of Malmesbury in an earlier century stood forth in the garb of a minstrel on a bridge and sang Scriptural songs to the people as they passed by, so now the church in the garb of dramatist went forth to meet the people with its Scripture reenforced by the appeal and color of the stage. It was a surprising, and we are bound to add, creditable instance of adaptation. The Latin Bible being a closed book to the people, the clergy faced the necessity of finding some means of making the appeal of the Bible clearer and stronger in the popular mind. If the meaning of the ritual was not level to their understanding, if the teaching of the Scripture failed to impress the people vividly, the problem was to discover a method of meeting such a situation as this.

The answer which the clergy gave to the problem

[3] *The Miracle Play in England*, Sidney W. Clarke, p. 4.

was the Mystery or Miracle-Play, which in the beginning was little more than an acted sermon. The answer was crude and childish: nevertheless it was a not unworthy effort to meet a difficult situation. And from it we should not be unwilling to learn, even down to the present hour, that the resources of the Bible for popular appeal are capable of surprising variety.

Moreover it is not to be considered strange or unexpected that the dramatic instinct should have laid hands upon the Bible. The Bible is full of dramatic material. It affords abundant opportunity for such appeal. It frankly invites such a method. Given an age whose sense of reverence was not yet fully refined by spiritual ideals, whose imagination was still in bondage to the sensual, and whose need of action was more insistent than its practice of meditation, and you have a state of mind wherein men would see in the Bible a storehouse of fancy, a realm of wealth in picture, and a wide arena for everyday action. To an age of simplicity and childlikeness the Bible must have seemed like a great stage, and its men and women like God's players. The people of that day were more concerned with what they saw in the Bible than with what they felt. They "visualized all the mysteries of faith." Later ages have had opportunity to find the deeper things of the Scripture. The early impact was visual and pictorial: it was vivid and literal.

In this state of mind the Bible was not a strange book, but one that was very near to the daily life of the people. With perfect ease they adapted and assimilated the scenes and incidents of the Scripture and gave them a familiar setting of everyday life. The

difficulty which later ages have experienced of conceiving of the Bible as a modern book was not their difficulty at all. It was to them a rescript of their own life: and by an easy effort of imagination they read themselves into the Book.

It was somewhat in this way we suppose, that the dramatic instinct of the Middle Ages took hold of the ready material of the Scripture and turned it into the popular and widely influential Miracle-Play. They "naturalized patriarchs and prophets as their own countrymen."[4] In the historical portions of the Old Testament these mediæval dramatists found a great company of personages who readily took their places on the stage as actors. All the elements of the drama were present in forms so picturesque and so appealing as to make the task of the religious playwright of the day not wholly arduous. That the playwrights were at the outset members of the clergy would insure the sermonic quality of the plays: the time came, of course, when this was not so certain. Sir Walter Scott in a familiar passage in *The Abbot* has shown us to what a sorry pass these Scriptural plays came in a later age, when the solemnities of religious instruction gave place "to those jocular personages, the Pope of Fools, the Boy-Bishop, and the Abbot of Unreason."[5]

But for generations the Miracle-Play furnished a supplement to the imperfect knowledge of the Scripture that was not to be despised. The tragic scenes of the Bible were especially rich in dramatic power, and

[4] *Illustrated History of English Literature,* Garnett and Gosse, Vol. I, p. 205.

[5] *The Abbot,* Chapter 14.

it is easy to see how these mediæval artists were tempted to overwork such scenes. The Fall of Man, the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Slaughter of the Innocents, the Day of Judgment—such striking scenes as these were certain to figure largely in the minds of the clerical playwrights, who were willing by whatsoever means they could to teach the stupendous lesson of Revelation. Nor was the Crucifixion omitted, for the sense of reverence however keen was as yet not fully developed—they saw no irreverence in following the story of the Gospel in their dramatic representation to its tragic close. The Passion Play of modern Europe, which no amount of trained reverence has been able to displace, is the survival of this mediæval tragedy of the Cross.

In all this process of dramatization there was no actual making of literature, for these religious dramatists did not produce plays for a reading public. Nevertheless it was akin to the making of literature, and undoubtedly preparatory to it. It kept alive the dramatic instincts of the people, fed their thought and imagination with Biblical fact and material, and helped to form the national mind after a Biblical mold. Thus this early religious drama, imperfect as it was, paved the way for that dramatic outburst of the future which became one of the chief glories of English literature.

For our part we are concerned to make clear that the origins of our dramatic expression in literature were in the Bible. It is true that the value of the Miracle-Play as literature is inconsiderable. But it is also true that "it preserved a conception of the drama in the minds of humble people throughout the rude

ages, and it expanded their views and helped them to realize bygone times and distant regions of the world."[6] Moreover it did much to link the minds of Englishmen to the action and motive of the Scripture: it helped to form in them a Biblical norm of thought: it gave them a Biblical background for their everyday life. Foreign to our modern ideas as is the notion of acting the Bible, it is nevertheless easy to realize something of the profound effect upon popular thought of dramatic presentations of the Scripture that were conducted year in and year out, not for a short time only, but for generations.

It was the Normans, apparently, who brought the germ of the Miracle-Play to England at the Conquest. With their love of shows and spectacles they had evolved special forms of dramatic entertainment of a religious nature, and these they brought with them across the channel. Later, when the new English tongue began to assert itself against the French and Anglo-Norman, the religious drama became immensely popular. Wandering minstrels, jongleurs and story-tellers, saw the possibilities of this popular form of entertainment, and went about on holidays and on other public occasions acting Bible stories and legends of the saints. It was the Bible that was the principal source of inspiration. "We are not surprised," says Miss Scudder, "to find that the drama of the race which had produced Caedmon and Cynewulf was almost wholly Biblical." If the Miracle-Play was not in its germ indigenous to England, it found there a congenial soil. After the Norman Conquest it grew

[6] *Illustrated History of English History,* Garnett and Gosse, Vol. I, p. 237.

apace. The earliest known date for a Miracle-Play in England is in the twelfth century. In the year 1264 the festival of Corpus Christi, involving a procession in the open air, was instituted.

"The fourteenth century saw the religious drama at its height in England: the fifteenth saw its decay: the sixteenth its death."[7] It was not until the year 1575 that the archbishop stopped the representations at York. Shakespeare was a youth in the town on the Avon at this time. No doubt he had witnessed the plays. Indeed his home was in the neighborhood of one of the principal centers of the drama at Coventry.

The church was driven by an emergency to adopt the popular religious drama of the fairs and holidays. These public occasions clashed with the festivals of the church, and when the clergy found that the people preferred the popular entertainment of the streets to the services of the church, they promptly appropriated the drama and carried it into the churches.

It began in a very simple way. "On great feast days," writes Miss Scudder, "white-robed choristers representing the Christmas shepherds and the Easter angels detached themselves from the rest of the choir or clergy, and with special chants, with gestures, later with more pronounced action, made visible to worshipers who could understand religion best through their eyes, the central facts of the Gospel story." The immediate result was that the churches were crowded. Soon these embryonic plays passed from the altar to the porch, and thence for the convenience of both actors and people, to the churchyard, and finally they

[7] *Literary History of the English People,* J. J. Jusserand, Vol. I, p. 489.

left the church altogether, and went into the streets and open places of the town.

The first actors were the clergy themselves, but when the plays went out into the streets, they found other friends, although the clergy continued to act for some time. In due time the Latin language was abandoned and the plays were produced in the language of the people. Secular actors of course, came to the front, and the minstrels were quick to lend a hand. Soon the plays assumed the form of pageants or movable theaters which were moved about from place to place in the towns on appointed days. The guilds presently took up the plays and became responsible for their annual presentation. A sort of popular education in the Scripture was carried along with these dramatic presentations. Where each guild had its own piece and each craftsman his assignment, there was, of course, a very intensive acquaintance with the Bible being fostered. When these trade guilds thus undertook the Miracle-Plays England had in embryo a national drama—*and it was founded on the Bible.*

An examination of the lists of plays belonging to the several cycles, reveals the scope of the early religious drama. The order of the Chester plays for example was as follows:—The Fall of Lucifer, the Creation of the World, the Ark and the Flood, the Histories of Lot and Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Story of Balaam and Balaak. Then the Birth of Christ, the Shepherds' Play, the Visit of the Three Kings, the Massacre of the Innocents, Christ in the Temple, the Temptation in the Wilderness. And so on to the Last Supper, the Passion, the Harrowing

of Hell, the Resurrection and the Ascension, the Descent of the Spirit and the Last Judgment. The York Cycle contained a play on the Lord's Prayer.

The different stories were assigned as far as possible to appropriate guilds. Thus the Creation of Eve and the Fall of Man were given by the Masons' Guild, the Sacrifice of Isaac by the Butchers, the Building of the Ark by the Shipwrights, the Flood by the Fishermen. In all this we see the tendency to incorporate the scenes of the Bible in the popular life. They conceived of the Holy Story, as has been said, as if it had happened in Lancashire or London! They introduced the manners and customs of the day; touches of humor even were not forbidden. In the Pageant of the Flood, Noah's wife is greatly annoyed because her husband has not told her about his preparations for the Flood. She did not believe it was going to rain anyway, and she would not go in!

The realism of these plays was at times most audacious. It would have been offensive in a more sophisticated age. With all their narrowness, superstition, and misinterpretation, they must have produced in the popular mind a soil that in time would become productive of great things. "Not only in breadth of scope," writes one, "but in rough truth to human life, in a frank realism that alternated with conventional types, in the blending of tragedy and comedy, the mediæval stage prepared the way for Shakespeare."

We cannot here follow the later development of religious drama in England in the Moralities, the Interludes, and the Chronicle-Plays. The character of "Vice," for example in the Morality-Play survives in

Shakespeare's "fool." These all are but links of connection with the great Elizabethan drama that was coming. We have only attempted to make clear in this study that the Bible had a large share, through the Miracle-Plays and the training of the people in dramatic expression, in preparing for the spacious days of the Tudor queen.

XII

MEN OF THE THRESHOLD

"Wyclif, Langland, and Chaucer are the three great figures of English literature in the Middle Ages."
Jusserand.

IT is convenient to divide the history of English literature into two main divisions—the time before, and the time after Chaucer. The dividing line is in the fourteenth century, the date of Chaucer's birth being approximately 1340. In this century a new spirit of nationalism arose in England, and the people of the tight little island took to themselves "wrestling thews" for their great future. All through the changeful times that followed the Norman Conquest there were English folk who held stubbornly to the English language, and by the early part of the fourteenth century the victory had been won over the Norman-French tongue. By the year 1339 English took the place of French in the schools, and in 1362 Parliament passed an act requiring that pleadings in law courts should henceforth be in English.[1]

It was in every sense a century of transition, and Providence provided great men whose mission it was to close old doors behind them and open new doors before them. It was the age of Dante and Petrarch and Boccaccio, of Cimabue and Giotto, and of Thomas

[1] *An Introduction to English Literature,* Henry S. Pancoast, p. 64.

Aquinas and Thomas à Kempis.[2] In England the starred names are Chaucer—

> "the first warbler, whose sweet breath
> Preluded those melodious bursts that fill
> The spacious times of great Elizabeth"—

Langland, the John Bunyan and Thomas Carlyle of the fourteenth century; and Wyclif, the "morning star of the Reformation." One is tempted to add the name of John Gower—"moral Gower" he was called by Chaucer. Such as these were appointed to carry literature forward to a new age.

Mediævalism was breaking up, and the dawn of the modern world was already streaking the sky. The spirit of the Renaissance was making itself felt in the world's organized life. It is difficult to realize that the age of Chaucer was still the age of chivalry, and more difficult still to sense the fact that the era of the printing press was but a single century away.

The sky, however, was dark enough in England in this transition century. It was the century of the Black Death that carried off nearly half the population and left a pall of desolation over the whole land. There were also serious ferments of popular feeling, as well as actual uprisings of the people, that gave a cast of unrest and anxiety to the century.

Moreover, the state of affairs in the church was quite as ominous. Corruption had gone deep into the life of the church, and spiritual leadership had well-nigh departed from it. The old learning of the schoolmen remained, but the influence of the revived classicism of Italy was manifesting itself. The three

[2] *The Christ of English Poetry*, C. W. Stubbs, D.D., p. 72.

writers whom we are now considering represent in themselves and their work the conditions of change that were prevalent. Langland embodies the spirit of social unrest; Chaucer betokens the new spirit of learning; Wyclif represents the spirit of protest against the prevailing corruptions of the church.

We are concerned to see to what extent the Bible influenced the work of the three men who stood thus upon the threshold of a new era. It is to the latter half of the fourteenth century that students go for the beginnings of a real English literature, and it is important to see that the Holy Scripture had a share in shaping the thought of the hour.

In the case of Chaucer we have one who cannot be definitely classed among religious writers. It is even difficult to determine what were his religious views. Some hold that he was an ardent follower of Wyclif. Others quite as stoutly maintain that there is no ground whatsoever for this view of the poet's religious position; that he was in reality much given to scepticism. The truth is that Chaucer's mind had no theological bent.[3] He was a poet of nature. See him going out in the morning and kneeling down to greet the daisy! The freshness of the morning, the song of birds, the gay life and color of the outer world—these were the things that appealed to him most of all. He was an interpreter rather of what he saw than of what he felt. The open sky, the sunny road, the green hedges, the meadows, and more than all, the people traveling through the world—all these interest him much more than introspective questions of belief and

[3] See a lengthy discussion of Chaucer's religion in Prof. Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer*, Vol. II.

experience. His abounding humor, his banter, his fine feeling for life, his enthusiasm for human folk notwithstanding their faults and foibles, are truly contagious. He believes in the world, and nature to him is "the vicar of the Almighty Lord." One stroke of his pen leads us out into the beauty of God's world.

"Whan that Aprille with his schowres swoote
The drought of Marche hath perced to the roote,
* * * * *
Thanne longen folk to gon on pilgrimages."[4]

He is full of joyous outbursts, as if the very youth of the world had obtained an incarnation in him. Until Tennyson came no one knew so well as Chaucer how to listen to the singing of birds.

"Herkneth these blisful briddes how they synge,
And seth the fressche floures how they springe;
Ful is myn hert of revel and solaas,"[5]

Many an ardent book-lover knows full well that sweet treachery of the heart which the poet so naïvely describes:—

"whan that the monethe of May
Is comen, and that I here the foules synge,
And that the floures gynnen for to sprynge,
Fairwel my boke, and my devocioun!"[6]

Yet in his own way we cannot escape the conviction that Chaucer was truly religious. If the poet's passion for nature carried him away from indoor sanctuaries, he was not lacking in worship in the church of all-out-of-doors; if his sincerity led him to hold up some religious practices to ridicule, he was none the less

[4] "The Prologue." Lines 1, 2, 12.
[5] "Nonne Prestes Tale." Lines 380-382.
[6] "Legende of Goode Women."

truly reverent toward all that was real and genuine in religion; if he did not pronounce himself upon doctrines and problems that other men of his age were busying themselves about, he was at the same time sincere in his appreciation of the divine touch that produced human worth and peace. When the poet sends forth his pilgrims it is plain that with all their good humor and jollity the real bond of fellowship is religion. It is the undercurrent of their thought. It is the clear implication of their attitudes. The setting of the *Canterbury Tales* is religious. Like writers of fiction in every age Chaucer was bound to take account of religion.[7] Men could not travel and converse together as did the Canterbury pilgrims without discussing religious topics.

But we may go further and say that the idea of a pilgrimage was in itself a Biblical idea. Literature has used the idea over and over again, and its common source is the Bible. Another poet of Chaucer's day, Langland, as we shall see, made use of the pilgrimage idea; while the great Puritan John Bunyan gave it a fixed place in English literature. It is a purely Biblical conception. Men are passing on in their journey, and it is a matter of great moment as to what they are doing and saying as they go. Their destination, as in the case of Chaucer's pilgrims, may be only an earthly shrine; even so the dusty road, the fellowship of the pilgrimage, the intimate talk by the way, and the serious destination of the journey, are all but types of human life at its best—journeying on to a greater end. The poet does not speak much of religion; neverthe-

[7] *English Literature in Account with Religion,* Edward Mortimer Chapman, p. 500.

less he is dealing with a religious subject, and he cannot refrain from using Biblical material. "Chaucer's pilgrims were sincerely religious."[8] We hear them talking in the language of the Scripture, and they are quick to interpret the incidents of life in terms of the Word of God.

Professor Lounsbury thinks that it may be doubted whether Chaucer's acquaintance with the authors to whom he refers was very profound. "Such is not the case, however, with his knowledge of one work. . . . This is the Bible. With it he would necessarily have become familiar in a thousand ways. That fact could be assumed, even did his writings themselves furnish no evidence upon the point. But upon the point their evidence is overwhelming. His references to passages and persons in both the Old and the New Testament, as well as in the Apocrypha, are so frequent and abundant that they would require for their full exhibition a special chapter."[9]

The poet's high estimation of women, and his recognition of marriage as deeply sacred in God's sight are truly Biblical. He who wrote:—

"A wyf is Goddes gifte verrayly;"[10]

* * * * *

"Mariage is a ful gret sacrament."[10]

* * * * *

"For wele or woo sche wol him not forsake.
Sche is not wery him to love and serve,
Theigh that he lay bedred til that he sterve,"[10]—

[8] *Introduction to the Study of English Literature,* Vida D. Scudder, p. 111.

[9] *Studies in Chaucer,* Thomas R. Lounsbury, Vol. II, p. 389.

[10] "The Merchant's Tale."

had not read the Scripture inattentively. Chaucer's reticence in doctrine is seen in his description of the dying Arcite:—

> "His spiryt chaungede hous, and wente ther,
> As I cam nevere, I can nat tellen wher."[11]

Nevertheless his words contain the echo of Scriptural thought. In another place the poet is less reserved on the subject of immortality.

> "Here is no hoom, here is but wildernesse.
> Forth, pilgrim, forth! forth best, out of thy stal!
> Look upon hye, and thonke God of al."[12]

The poet's character sketches interest us because of the lightness and sympathy of his touch; but more than this, because of a certain haunting spirituality which he likes above all to give to his characters. Of the Knight he says,

> "He was a verray perfight gentil knight."

Of the young Squire he writes,

> "Curteys he was, lowely, and servysable."

The picture of the Nonne and Prioress, Eglentyne, is unmistakable,

> "Ful wel sche sang the servise divyne."

The Clerk also is clearly set before us,

> "And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche."

In the Plowman the poet has incarnated the Lord's summary of the law,

> "God lovede he best with al his hoole herte,—
> And thanne his neighbour right as himselve."

[11] "The Knight's Tale." Lines 1951, 2. [12] "Good Counseil."

Contrast with these descriptions the man whose soul is "in his purs," a character study in a single line, embodying the meaning of the Master's words, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Contrast also the picture of the Doctor of Physic,

"His studie was but litel on the Bible."

Most fascinating of all Chaucer's character sketches is his description of the Parish Priest.

"A good man was ther of religioun,
And was a poure persoun of a toun."

The picture is full of Biblical color and rich with Biblical phrase. He is poor in this world's goods,

"But riche he was of holy thought and werk."

He was "in adversité ful pacient;" and his wants were few.

"He cowde in litel thing han suffisaunce."

Like the Master Himself, his meat was to do the Father's will.

"Wyd was his parische, and houses fer asonder."

He was no shepherd to go running about upon errands of self while the flock fared ill.

"But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,
So that the wolf ne made it not miscarye;
He was a schepherde and no mercenarie."

The pen that wrote these lines was only following the tracing of Jesus' immortal picture of contrast between the Good Shepherd and the Hireling. (See John 10:

7-18.) Best of all are the lines in which he tells us that the priest was "a doer of the Word,"

> "But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve,
> He taughte, but first he folwede it himselve."[13]

It is a beautiful picture of the simplicity of the Gospel, and of the quiet grandeur of a consecrated life. One is reminded of what Mrs. Browning writes of Chaucer—

> "with his infantine
> Familiar clasp of things divine."[14]

To Chaucer Christ was "the first stocke father of gentilnes;" and he who "desireth gentil for to bee" must "followe his trace." No poet of all the ages has paid a higher tribute to the grand old name of *gentleman*!

> "All weare he miter, crowne, or diademe."[15]

Three of the *Canterbury Tales* are distinctly religious. These are the "Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecelia," the "Tale of the Prioress," and the "Tale of Constance," told by the Man of Law. In writing these stories the poet drew heavily upon the Bible. Others, like the "Nonne Prestes Tale," are almost equally rich in Biblical material. It is in this that Chaucer makes his striking adaptation of the Scriptural words—"Be sure your sin will find you out."

> "Mordre wil out, that se we day by day—
> Though it abyde a yeer, or tuo, or thre,
> Mordre wil out, this my conclusioun."[16]

[13] See "The Prologue" for these character sketches.
[14] "A Vision of Poets."
[15] "A Ballad, Teaching What is Gentleness."
[16] "The Nonne Prestes Tale." Lines 232, 236, 237.

It is in this same tale, where he is defending the validity of dreams, that he cites certain well-known cases in Scripture.

"I pray you loketh wel
In the olde Testament, of Daniel,
If he held dremes eny vanyte."

The case of Joseph is mentioned to show that dreams are sometimes

"Warnyng of thinges that schul after falle."

The King of Egypt, Pharaoh, with

"His bakere and his botiler also"[17]—

has a lesson to teach. One wonders if the poet's space or meter did not permit mention of the dream of Pilate's wife. In some instances Chaucer transcribes the words of Scripture almost literally.

"Caste alle awey the werkes of derknesse,
And armeth you in armure of brightnesse."[18]

The Lawyer's story of Constance is very rich in Biblical reference. It is intended to set forth the divine protection that is thrown about innocence, especially in times of adversity. In this story Chaucer is paraphrasing those affirmations of Scripture that assure us that however many may be the troubles of the righteous, the Lord delivereth them out of them all.

"Who saved Daniel in thorrible cave,"—
"Who kepte Jonas in the fisches mawe,
Till he was spouted up at Ninive?"[19]

[17] "The Nonne Prestes Tale." Lines 307-317.
[18] "Second Nun's Tale" Lines 384, 5. Cf. Romans 13: 12.
[19] "The Man of Lawes Tale."

The words of the heroine echo the confidence of believers in all ages.

> "He that me kepte fro the false blame,
> Whil I was on the lond amonges you,
> He can me kepe fro harm and eek fro schame
> In the salt see, although I se nat how."[20]

Chaucer's description of the Cross in the "Lawyer's Tale" is one of the most impressive pictures of literature.

> "Victorious tre, protecciouu of trewe,
> That oonly were worthy for to bere
> The kyng of heven, with his wounds newe,
> The white lamb, that hurt was with a spere."

We may conclude this brief examination of Chaucer's dependence upon the Bible with the poet's happy benediction:—

> "Now, goode God, if that it be thy wille,
> As saith my Lord, so make us alle good men;
> And bringe us to his heighe blisse. Amen."[21]

Surely the poet Dryden was right when he said of Chaucer, "Here is God's plenty."

It is a remarkable fact that three hundred years before the *Pilgrim's Progress* was written and five hundred years before *Sartor Resartus,* there lived a man in England who has rightly been called the John Bunyan and the Thomas Carlyle of his age. This was William Langland or Langley, the peasant-poet of Malvern Hills, a contemporary of Chaucer, and the author of *Piers Plowman,* one of the greatest and yet simplest poems in the English language. "Langland,"

[20] "The Man of Lawes Tale."

[21] "The Nonne Prestes Tale." Lines 623-625.

says Professor Lounsbury, "was a Puritan two hundred years before Puritanism existed under that name."[22] "Both Carlyle and Langland," writes Miss Scudder, "were at once conservative and radical; each, longing for peace, became a destructive power; the work of each was deeply prophetic, and reached out among forces and tendencies which the seers themselves were able only dimly to understand. They were two voices crying aloud in two desert centuries, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'"[23]

Langland's work came out of the heart of the church. The author was a monk; yet he was severely critical of the church, at least of the religious abuses of the day. Like Carlyle, he cried out for reality, for sincerity, for truth "in the inward parts." In his great poem we catch for the first time the note of social passion, which in later centuries swells like the tones of an organ in volume and power. The complaint of the poor found no other such voice until Burns came and wrote "The Cotter's Saturday Night."

The name "Plowman" was, of course, a bid for popular attention, and in a century of such unrest—it was the century of John Ball and Wat Tyler and the "Peasants' Revolt"—Langland's book became the book of the people. It was the dawn of democracy appearing in literature. Of the poet himself little is known, except that he was a man of the people, that he was very poor, and that "his world is the world of the poor." As to his studies, there is little to prove his scholarship. Nevertheless he was a shrewd ob-

[22] *Studies in Chaucer,* Vol. II, p. 468.
[23] *Social Ideals in English Letters,* pp. 25, 26.

server, a fearless thinker, and a writer who felt a spiritual burden. His poem is steeped in Scripture, and much of its powerful effect is to be explained by its Biblical background. "If the quotations from the Bible and the works of the Fathers are not always accurate, the superabundance of them, and the ease with which they recur under his pen, are proof sufficient of his having been impregnated, as it were, with religious literature."[24] Ten Brink writes these enthusiastic words about Langland—"One of the greatest in the majestic line of English poets, whose muse was inspired by the highest interests of man, those of religion, he was the worthy predecessor of Milton."[25]

Piers Plowman, like the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer, is the story of a pilgrimage: only the pilgrimage is to the mystic land of Truth.

"In a summer season
When soft was the sun,
I put me into clothes,
As I a shepherd were;
In habit as a hermit,
Unholy of works,
Went wide in this world,
Wonders to hear,
And on a May morning,
On Malvern hills,
Me befell a wonder."[26]

The poet fell asleep—

"Under a broad bank,
By a burn's side,"

[24] *Piers Plowman,* Jusserand, p. 172.
[25] *English Literature,* Ten Brink, Vol. I, p. 367.
[26] Opening lines of *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman.*

and dreamed a "marvelous dream," of a tower on a hill and "a fair field of folk," where were all manner of men,

> "The mean and the rich,
> Working and wondering."

It is a veritable Vanity Fair, representing the world at large with its motley crowds. There are such allegorical figures as Conscience, Falsehood, Pity, Reason, Hunger and Law, and there is one very prominent figure named Lady Meed or Bribery, who is the incarnation of worldiness. It is apparent that the poet is dreaming about the world as it is, with "Lady Holy Church"—alas! that her character falls so far below her name!—and "the Seven Deadly Sins." In the midst of great perplexity,

> "A thousand of men there thronged together
> Cried upward to Christ and to His clean Mother
> To have grace to go with them Truth to seek."

Now "Piers Plowman" comes upon the scene. It is to be noted that he came from the fields where he had been working, just as the world's Savior came to a manger, and was hailed by shepherds from the fields. Langland believes that glory is near to dust: he does not hesitate to preach the Gospel of Labor. There is another allegory, a vision of *Do Well, Do Bet* and *Do Best,* and presently we discover that "Piers Plowman" is highly exalted: he has become even in his guise as a plowman the true revealer of Love.

> "And that knoweth no clerke: no creature on earth
> But Piers the Plowman. Petrus, id est Cristus."

It is a remarkable transformation, and one that con-

veys a wonderful lesson. In other words, Langland makes it plain that the Master Workman of all is Christ, who is the real Social Emancipator and Guide of men. He comes in the guise of a Plowman in order that He may identify Himself with the common life and work of men. There are few nobler passages in English poetry than that in which Langland describes Jesus "in a poor man's apparell." How much of the Scripture both in spirit and word is found in the picture:—

"For our joy and our health, Jesus Christ of Heaven
In a poor man's apparell pursueth us ever,
And looketh upon us in their likeness and that with lovely cheer
To know us by our kind heart and casting of our eyes,
Whether we love the lords here before our Lord of bliss.
For all we are Christ's creatures and of his coffers rich
And brethren as of one blood as well beggars as earls."

We see at once what service the peasant poet is rendering us here. He is making it plain that the likeness of Christ may reappear even in a plowman, in any man who is doing fair and honest work.[27] And this is the deep message of Christ's humanity always, its identification with our common humanity, and its leaving upon our humanity a new mark of value.

"Jesus Christ of Heaven
In a poor man's apparell pursueth us ever."

If Langland had not written another sentence, this alone would entitle him to rank among the Christian poets, and the sentiment may well be treasured in

[27] *The Servant in the House,* Charles Rann Kennedy, is a recent and impressive adaptation of this idea.

memory as an expression of the best and strongest things that men are trying to do down to the present time in behalf of their fellow-men.

Later the dreamer sees another vision as he sits in church during the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. He sees Piers the Plowman coming in with a Cross before the people,

> "painted all bloody,
> "And came in with a cross before the common people
> And light like in all things to the Lord Jesus."

The climax is reached in a description of the death of Christ, and of his triumph over death and hell. "I cannot refrain from adding here my conviction," says Professor Skeat, "that there are not many passages in English poetry which are so sublime in their conception as the 18th Passus. Some of the lines are rudely and quaintly expressed, but there are also many of great beauty and power, which buoyantly express the glorious triumph of Christ."[28]

At length the poet awakes with the bells of Easter sounding out their joyous call.

> "And men rang the Easter bells and right with that I waked,
> And called Kit my wife and Kalote my daughter,
> 'Arise ye and reverence God's Resurrection,
> And creep to the Cross on knees and kiss it for a jewel!'"

The figure of the triumphant Christ which Langland reveals to us is not that of a King in imperial splendor; "but a figure of the homely and friendly Christ, dwelling with humble men, helping them with their crafts, teaching them to plough and to ditch, and to

[28] Introduction to the *Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman.* XXXV.

live a leal life and a true: a Divine Comrade 'who standeth at the right hand of the poor.' "[29]

It is just this naturalness of the poet, this homeliness of his descriptions even of the sublimest scenes—Lowell thinks that homeliness is especially characteristic of early English poetry[30]—that shows his sensitiveness to the influence of the Bible. More than anything else Langland was a Biblical poet.

There was another great contemporary of Chaucer in the fourteenth century—John Wyclif, who stood on the threshold of the new era with his rich offering of an English Bible for the English people!

[29] *The Christ of English Poetry,* C. W. Stubbs, p. 84.
[30] *My Study Windows,* p. 195.

XIII

ENGLISH VERSIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

"I wish they were translated into all languages of the people. I wish that the husbandman might sing parts of them at his plough, and the weaver at his shuttle, and that the traveler might beguile with their narration the weariness of his way."—Erasmus.

THE progress of English literature, like the progress of history itself, has never been a steady, unceasing process. Rather it has been by alternate movements and pauses. A discriminating critic living at the date of Chaucer's death in 1400 would certainly have been tempted to prophesy an immediate era of literary prosperity, as a result of the stimulus given by the author of *The Canterbury Tales.* As a matter of fact the period following Chaucer was one of comparative barrenness. New influences were needed to fertilize the soil of English thought, and in this process of further stimulation the Bible had no inconsiderable part to play.

The beginning of the fifteenth century brings us within a stone's throw of the great Elizabethan age, when English literature blossomed out into almost divine beauty. But the "spacious days" of Elizabeth could not come until certain events had transpired,

more than one of which are closely related to the Bible. If the fifteenth century was not productive of literature in a large way, it was nevertheless preparatory for a greater period that was to follow. Some generations, like some men, are called, not to execute, but to prepare. Viewed in the light of its stupendous events, the fifteenth century was of the greatest importance to the progress of English literature.

The first of these events was the invention of printing. Wyclif might translate the Scripture into the English language, but his version lacked a suitable instrument of wide popularity—it was dependent upon the pen of the copyist. When the Gutenberg presses were set up an immediate emancipation of thought took place. Whether or not it is true that the first book printed at Mainz was the Latin Bible which came to be known later as the Mazarin Bible, from having been found in Cardinal Mazarin's library in Paris—it is certainly true that the printing-press was dedicated at once to the service of the Word of God. When English writers mention the names of those who laid the foundations of England's greatness, a place of honor should be given always to William Caxton who set up the first printing-press in England about 1476.

One of the first books printed in English was the *Golden Legend,* containing considerable portions of the Scripture. "The printing-press," says Green, "was making letters the common property of all. In the last thirty years of the fifteenth century ten thousand editions of books and pamphlets are said to have been published throughout Europe."[1] It is difficult for us

[1] *A Short History of the English People,* Chap. VI, Section IV.

at this late day, accustomed as we are to the abundant fruitage of the printing-press, even to imagine the opening of doors that came to pass through such a momentous change. The world became almost in a day a new world. It was a wonderful hour in the world's history, and the beginning of a new epoch in the history of literature, when the Bible was sent broadcast by means of the printing-press.

Simultaneous with the invention of printing came the birth of an era of New Learning in Europe, called the Revival of Letters or the Renaissance. It was about the middle of the century that the printing-press was set up in Mainz. Constantinople fell before the Turks in 1453. The fall of the city on the Bosphorus scattered many scholars who had made it the center of their labors. They came westward, bringing with them many precious Greek manuscripts, including manuscripts of the Scripture. Hence the famous saying—that when Greece arose from the grave, she arose with the New Testament in her hand.

Ere long the new wave of learning reached England and overflowed its shores. English scholars studied at Padua, Bologna or Florence, and returned to teach at Oxford and Cambridge. "Every breeze was dusty with the golden pollen of Greece, Rome, and of Italy."[2] Such illustrious scholars as Erasmus, John Colet, and Sir Thomas More, starred the history of English literature in this period. Erasmus, who "laid the egg that Luther hatched," published his Greek Testament in 1516, and so great was the excitement produced in England and on the continent by this work, that thousands of copies were circulated. It

[2] "Essay on Spencer," J. R. Lowell, in *Among My Books.*

was the proud boast of Erasmus that he taught literature, which before him was almost pagan, to speak of Christ. It may truly be said that the best English literature has been ever since speaking of Christ!

It is unnecessary here to do more than mention a third great event of these intervening generations—the Protestant Reformation—which brought about a spiritual revival even as the Renaissance had produced a revival of letters.

These three events, the Printing-Press, the Renaissance, the Reformation, were truly transforming influences. Falling as they do, in the period of one hundred and fifty years between Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth, they had a large part to play in preparing for the great days of the Tudor Queen. There is, however, another important event that belongs for the most part in the same period. This is the preparation of English versions of the Bible. For although Wyclif was a contemporary of Chaucer, his version did not appear until toward the close of the fourteenth century.

We have seen how little by little, in the form of paraphrases and partial versions, the Bible had been trying through the centuries to break forth into the vernacular. Meantime it left its mark everywhere upon what men wrote. But the centuries went by in England and there was no vernacular version. It was eight hundred years since Augustine and his monks came to England with the Holy Scripture, and the priests of the church were still chanting from the Latin Bible. It was a thousand years since Jerome made his Latin version, and in all these centuries the Vulgate reigned supreme. The great number of

copies still extant proves how widely it was used. Charlemagne scattered it all over his realm. The monks of the middle ages multiplied copies by hundreds.[3]

The long delay that occurred in the coming of a full English version is one of the difficult facts of history. It may be that England was not ready until Wyclif came. It is not to be forgotten that there had been Danish invasions, and there had been a Norman Conquest. All through the centuries the church held tenaciously to her beloved Latin.[4] No other single book that the world has ever known has wielded so great an influence as the Latin Vulgate. Its career in England is a romance of centuries.[5]

The appearance of Wyclif's English Bible was an event of nothing less than national significance. His is one of the proudest names in English history. The quiet pastorate in the village of Lutterworth to which he was obliged to retire could not contain him. The

[3] *The Ancestry of Our English Bible,* Prof. Ira M. Price, p. 174.

[4] See a full discussion of this question in H. W. Hoare's volume, *The Evolution of the English Bible,* pp. 9-22.

[5] "The Vulgate, though a composite work, will always rank among the most remarkable books of the world. . . . But the Vulgate has more in it than its nobility as a translation. It is the venerable source from which the Church has drawn the largest part of its ecclesiastical vocabulary. Terms now so familiar as to arouse no curiosity as to their origin, 'scripture,' 'spirit,' 'penance,' 'sacrament,' 'communion,' 'salvation,' 'propitiation,' 'elements,' 'grace,' 'glory,' 'conversion,' 'discipline,' 'sanctification,' 'congregation,' 'election,' 'eternity,' 'justification,' all come from Jerome's Bible." *The Evolution of the English Bible,* H. W. Hoare, p. 236.

English laureate Tennyson sings in lines that reproduce the Scripture—

> "Not least art thou Bethlehem, thou little Bethlehem,
> In Judah, for in thee the Lord was born;
> Nor thou in Britain, little Lutterworth,
> Least, for in thee the Word was born again."

It is impossible to describe in words the influence of Wyclif's version in developing the thought and inspiring the speech of England. In giving to the English people their first complete Bible in the language of every-day use he practically established the English language itself, and turned the current of English thought and literature into Biblical channels. To this day the echo of his version—its words and phrases and sentences—is heard in the English-speaking world. It is not too much to say that his English Bible marked almost the birth of modern free institutions of speech, custom and government. Wherever the Bible is known in the people's speech, the spirit of freedom begins to assert itself. It teaches men to think in the high terms of destiny. It reminds them that they have a great work for God and man to do in the world. It magnifies judgment and conscience, and encourages men in the exercise of a spirit of independence, which finds its resting-place in God. Thus it furnishes constructive material for literature.

For a hundred and fifty years these manuscript copies of Wyclif and his successors penetrated the life of England. Poor priests went everywhere reading the Bible to the people in their own language. The people thus became familiar with the picturesque phraseology of the Bible. Once this process of infiltration of the Bible into the English mind was begun,

no one could stop it. In these years the Bible was becoming a part of the very bone and marrow of England, never to be eradicated. Wyclif thought to render England a religious service; unconsciously he also rendered a great literary service. In his English Bible he forged a splendid instrument for literary use. All future writers of English literature must be indebted to him. He made the thought and diction of the Bible the common stock of English thought and utterance. The historian Green speaks of him as the "founder of our later English prose." Wyclif's prose did for the English of his day what Chaucer's verse did—"set the stamp of literary genius upon a native instrument hitherto unstrung and uncertain of sound." He made the Bible "treasure-trove for the students of literature."[6]

"It is difficult in our day to imagine the impression such a book must have produced in an age which had scarcely anything in the way of popular literature, and which had been accustomed to regard the Scriptures as the special property of the learned. It was welcomed with an enthusiasm which could not be restrained, and read with avidity both by priests and laymen. . . . The homely wisdom, blended with eternal truth, which has long since enriched our vernacular speech with a multitude of proverbs, could not thenceforth be restrained in its circulation by mere pious awe or time-honored prejudice."[7]

John Foxe tells us that "a poor yeoman has been known to give a load of hay for a few leaves of Paul

[6] Article on John Wyclif in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature,* Vol. 39.

[7] *Studies in English History,* J. Gardiner, 1-2.

or the Gospels." Such was the fever in the blood created by Wyclif's version. It unlocked a treasure-house that was hitherto closely guarded from the people—at most they had had but flitting glimpses of the riches within. It placed in the hands of a highly gifted people—a people possessed of native literary genius—abundant material for thought and expression. By one act it opened the door into a new age of literary cultivation. It could not now be long until the slumbering genius of the people would awake to a new and wonderful life. We do not wonder therefore that historians speak of the age of Wyclif as the beginning of a new era in the history of English literature.

After Wyclif there is a gap of nearly one hundred and fifty years in the narrative of Bible translation, and then we come to the romantic, yet also tragic, story of the final struggle of the English Bible to gain a secure place for itself, and of the tremendous welcome which the English people gave to it. The name of William Tyndale must always be spoken with reverence, not only by students of Church History, but by students of English literature as well. He is the true father of our English Bible, and likewise a real founder of our literature. His is one of the most glorious names in English annals. A student in Oxford University, he was early given to the study of the Scripture. The spirit of the martyr was in him from the beginning, and when an adherent of the Pope declared in controversy one day that it were better to be without God's laws than the Pope's, Tyndale's heart was fired and he replied in ever-memorable words, "If God spare my life, I will cause a boy that driveth

a plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

Unable to carry on his work of translation, he fled to the continent, pursued always by his enemies. After indescribable trials he succeeded at length in 1526 in smuggling six thousand copies of his English Bible into England. This now was a printed English Bible, the first that England had known. These Bibles stirred England as by a revolution. It was made a criminal offense to own a copy. Piles of Tyndale's Bibles were burned in bonfires. The Bishop of London launched a fierce philippic against the new English Bible at Paul's Cross, and at the end of his sermon hurled a copy into a fire that was burning before him.

But nothing could stop it. One edition after another was printed and distributed although Tyndale himself dared not set foot in England. In 1536 he was betrayed by a false friend and cast into prison near Brussels. There on October 6, 1536 he was strangled and his body was burned, the very year that Anne Boleyn was beheaded in the Tower of London. As he died he uttered his prophetic prayer—"Lord, open the eyes of the King of England." Such in brief is the story of blood and martyrdom connected with the accomplishment of this important task.

When it is remembered that ninety-seven per cent. of the words in Tyndale's version are Anglo-Saxon, we realize how close this English Bible came to the life and thought of the people. "Of the translation itself," says Froude, "though since that time it has been many times revised and altered, we may say that it is substantially the Bible with which we are all familiar. The peculiar genius, if such a word may be permitted,

which breathes through it, the mingled tenderness and majesty, the Saxon simplicity, the preternatural grandeur, unequaled, unapproached, in the attempted improvements of modern scholars, all bear the impress of the mind of one man, William Tyndale."[8]

Speaking of Tyndale's folios, Taine says, "Hence have sprung much of the English language and half of the English manners. To this day the country is Biblical. It was these big books which had transformed Shakespeare's England."[9]

The flood-gates were open in England. Other editions quickly followed Tyndale's version. The eyes of the King, too, were soon opened and he gave permission to print and circulate the English Bible. Miles Coverdale followed with his version, which was "preëminent in the qualities of melody, distinction and beauty;"[10] and John Rogers came next with his "Matthew's Bible." Rogers suffered martyrdom under "Bloody Mary." Others followed in the ensuing years, notably the Great Bible, with a title-page repre-

[8] *History of England,* Vol. 3, p. 84.

[9] *English Literature.* III. Renaissance.

[10] Those beautiful sentences of the Authorized Version—"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is nigh"—"My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever more"—are Coverdale's translations that were carried over into the King James Version. "It is to the melodiousness of his phrasing, to his mastery over what may be described as the literary semitone, to his innumerable dexterities and felicitous turns of expression, that we owe more probably than we most of us recognize of that strangely moving influence which seems ever to be welling up from the perennial springs of the English Bible, and from the Prayer Book Version of the Psalms." *The Evolution of the English Bible,* H. W. Hoare, p. 178.

senting King Henry the Eighth handing a copy of the Word to Cranmer. It was called the "Great Bible" because of its size, being fifteen inches long, and nine inches wide. This Bible was chained to the reading desks in churches and was publicly read to the people."[11] Next came the Genevan Bible, which became the Puritan Bible, and which wielded an immense influence down to the time of the Authorized Version. The Genevan was of small size, convenient for use in the homes. In all probability it was this Bible that was used by William Shakespeare. At any rate it was for sixty years the household Bible of England and Scotland, preluding the time of which Carlyle speaks —"In the poorest cottage in the land, there is one Book, wherein the spirit of man has found light and nourishment, and an interpreting response to whatever is deepest in him."

The Genevan Bible was published in 1560. It is now truly the Elizabethan age, for the Tudor Queen has been two years on the throne, and the birth of Shakespeare is but four years distant. Spenser was a boy of eight; Bacon was born in the following year. On the day of the Coronation, as the royal procession was making its way along Cheapside, the Queen's carriage was stopped and a copy of the Holy Scripture was placed in her hands by an old man representing Time, with Truth at his side in the person of a child.[12]

[11] "It is from the setting up of the Great Bible in parish churches that the ever-widening influence of the Gospel teaching on English life may be said both officially and practically to date." *The Evolution of the English Bible,* H. W. Hoare, p. 197.

[12] See Hoare, p. 219. It was a copy of the "Great Bible" that

The Queen reverently kissed the Book and pledged herself to read it. The incident symbolizes the complete entrance of the English Bible into English history.

All accounts agree in depicting the popular enthusiasm for the Bible. "England became the people of a book, and that book was the Bible." The most impressive and picturesque account of the period ever written is that of Green in his famous eighth chapter on "Puritan England."[13] The moral change that passed over England in the latter half of Elizabeth's reign was tremendous. The Bible was as yet the one English book which was familiar to every Englishman; it was read at churches and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm. When Bishop Bonner set up the first six Bibles in St. Paul's many persons came to hear the public reading, especially if a good reader could be secured. There was one John Porter with a good presence and a strong voice who was very popular. In addition to this public reading from the large Bibles, the small Genevan Bibles went into many homes. "The whole prose literature of England, save the forgotten tracts of Wyclif, has grown up since the translation of the Scriptures by Tyndale and Coverdale. So far as the nation at large was concerned, no history, no romance, hardly any poetry, save the little-known verse of Chaucer, existed in the English tongue when the Bible was ordered to be set up in churches. Sunday after

was presented to the Queen. See *A History of English Literature,* Nicoll and Seccombe, Vol. I, p. 127.

[13] *A Short History of the English People,* J. R. Green.

Sunday, day after day, the crowds that gathered round Bonner's Bibles in the nave of St. Paul's or the family group that hung on the words of the Geneva Bible in the devotional exercises at home, were leavened with a new literature. Legend and annal, war-song and psalm, state-roll and biography, the mighty voices of prophets, the parables of evangelists, stories of mission journeys, of perils by the sea and among the heathen, philosophic arguments, apocalyptic visions, all were flung broadcast over minds unoccupied for the most part by any rival learning. . . . As a mere literary monument, the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue, while its perpetual use made it from the instant of its appearance the standard of our language. . . . The mass of picturesque allusion and illustration which we borrow from a thousand books, our fathers were forced to borrow from one. . . . When Spenser poured forth his warmest love-notes in the 'Epithalamion' he adopted the very words of the Psalmist, as he bade the gates open for the entrance of his bride. When Cromwell saw the mists break over the hills of Dunbar, he hailed the sunburst with the cry of David, 'Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered.' "

This picture of the growth of popular education by means of the Bible, while it has never been duplicated in like measure, has nevertheless been often repeated in method and result. In mission lands today popular education is being constantly fostered by the Word of God. Future generations in these lands may look back to the rise of literature in the Bible, even as we look back to the days in England when the versions awakened the minds of the people, and set their genius

to work upon new and wonderful material. It is safe to say that the new eras of literature could never have dawned in England without the English Bible. Shakespeare himself grew up in this Bible-saturated atmosphere, and when he began to write England was already like "a nest of singing birds," the heart of the nation having been stirred to poetry and romance by the music of the Word of God.

It is needless here to recite the history of the version which in 1611 took the place of the Great Bible, the Genevan Bible, and the Bishops' Bible—the one known as the Authorized or King James Version. King James was a not over wise monarch, and he was weak and vacillating besides. Nevertheless a historian declares of him that he was the "wisest fool in Christendom."

Many causes cooperated to produce the brilliancy of the Elizabethan age. "The translation of the Bible," says Hazlitt, "was the chief engine in the great work. It revealed the visions of the prophets, and conveyed the lessons of inspired teachers to the meanest of the people. It gave them a common interest in a common cause. Their hearts burnt within them as they read. It gave a mind to the people, by giving them common subjects of thought and feeling."[14]

The King James Version has its defects, but it is a work of singular, almost inexplicable power. Its English is as a rule marked by rare beauty and simplicity. "It lives on the ear," said the Catholic Faber, "like a music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells. . . . Its felicities seem to be almost things

[14] *Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth,* W. Hazlitt. Lecture I.

instead of words." It is truly a part of the national mind, the very warp and woof of English thinking. "Its noble figures, happy turns, and pithy sentiments are upon every lip. It pervades the whole literature of our country."[15] Writers vie with one another in testifying to the unique supremacy and remarkable influence of the King James Version of Holy Scripture.

A professor of the English language and literature in Yale University[16] speaks of it as "the first English classic, as seems by all competent authorities to be allowed." "No other book," he adds, "has so penetrated and permeated the hearts and speech of the English race as has the Bible." The effects wrought by it, he tells us, were obtained by comparatively few words. While Shakespeare uses 21,000 words, and Milton about 13,000, it is estimated that the Bible employs only about 6,000 words. English literature, he affirms, is deeply impregnated with Scriptural themes. Quotations, and allusions abound in great numbers, and "many phrases have grown so common that they have become part of the web of current English speech, and are hardly thought of as Biblical at all."

[15] *A History of English Literature,* Nicoll and Seccombe, Vol. I, p. 130.

[16] Prof. Albert S. Cook. The references are from his volume entitled *The Authorized Version of the Bible and its Influence.* Prof. Cook gives an interesting, although very meagre list of Biblical phrases that have become current, such as "highways and hedges," "clear as crystal," "still small voice," "hip and thigh," "arose as one man," "lick the dust," "a thorn in the flesh," "broken reed," "root of all evil," "the nether millstone," "sweat of his brow," "heap coals of fire," "a law unto themselves," "the fat of the land," "dark sayings," "a soft answer," "a word in season," "moth and rust," "weighed in the balance and found wanting."

Froude speaks of its "mingled tenderness, and majesty, the Saxon simplicity, the preternatural grandeur." Wordsworth wrote of "the grand storehouses of enthusiastic and meditative imagination" in the prophetic and lyrical parts of Holy Scripture. Coleridge went so far as to say that "intense study of the Bible will keep any writer from being vulgar in point of style."

By far the most remarkable tribute ever paid to the English Bible is that of Thomas Huxley—"Consider this great historical fact, that, for three centuries, this book has been woven into all that is noblest and best in English history; consider that it has become the national epic of Great Britain, and that it is as familiar to noble and simple, from John O'Groat's to Land's End, as Tasso and Dante once were to the Italians; consider that it is written in the noblest and purest English, and that it abounds in exquisite beauties of literary form; and, finally, consider that it forbids the veriest hind, who never left his native village, to be ignorant of the existence of other countries and other civilizations, and of a great past stretching back to the furthest limits of the oldest nations in the world."

XIV

SHAKESPEARE AND THE BIBLE

"Shakespeare leans upon the Bible."
Emerson.

IN the previous chapter on the English Versions we endeavored to set forth in outline at least the great change which came over English society as a prelude to the Elizabethan age. An age such as this could not come like a mushroom overnight. We have not hesitated to affirm that the influence of the Bible in English dress was very great in preparing for the spacious days that were to come. Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558. William Shakespeare was born in 1564. In 1560, as we have seen, the Genevan Version was published. Other versions preceded it, and there were still others to follow. The bringing of these dates together may serve to indicate the importance we attach to the English Bible.

Even in the days of Henry the Eighth, that monarch had complained that the new English Scripture was "disputed, rimed, sung, and jangled in every tavern and ale-house." His words were no doubt meant to strike at the tendency to vulgarize Scripture—the same tendency which we have already observed in the case of the Mystery and Morality plays. Yet it was just this leveling of Scripture to the masses of the people that constituted the great strategy of the ver-

sions. The translators deliberately planned to give the Bible to the plow-boy as well as to the noble, to the peasant as well as to the priest. In so doing they set free in England influences that were certain to pervade the life of the nation. If these influences cannot in every case be traced in literature, it is none the less certain that they helped to produce an atmosphere that was favorable to the making of a strong literature.

The England into which Shakespeare was born was an England that had welcomed the Bible in the vernacular, and that was becoming saturated in every pore with Biblical speech and thought. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the extent to which the new English versions had permeated the life of the country by the time Shakespeare took up his pen. Lord Macaulay, referring to the statesmen of Elizabeth's day, affirms that their eloquence "was the eloquence of men who had lived with the first translators of the Bible, and with the authors of the Book of Common Prayer."[1] When it is remembered that the Elizabethan age was throughout an age of Bible translation, that it was distinguished in a remarkable degree for interest in the Scripture and enthusiasm for it, that in all this time the Bible was uppermost in the minds of men as a topic of conversation and discussion, that in fact it was the one popular book of the day—we may realize a little better what it meant to have lived with the first translators and the first readers of the English Bible.

For one thing it is impossible to conceive of any author of genius, who truly represents the national

[1] "Essay on Bacon."

mind of that day, as being indifferent to the Bible. On the contrary, we should expect that the pervasive influence of the Scripture would leave a deep mark upon all the truly constructive literature of the time. Genius is of all things human the most sensitive. Whether consciously or otherwise, it is bound to reflect the prevailing mood of the day. An author may not be in full accord with the moral and spiritual attitude of his generation — nevertheless he cannot wholly divest himself of the atmosphere in which he lives and writes. If our powers of perception were but delicate enough it would be possible to trace the history of any period in its literature.

It is in Edmund Spenser that we realize the dawn of a new glory in literature. His *Shepherd's Calendar,* and *Faerie Queen* advise us at once that a new birth of the imagination has come. In Spenser one does not find the language of Scripture so much quoted, although in the "Epithalamion" he uses the very words of the Psalmist in bidding the gates to open for the entrance of his bride. It is the tone of purity in Spenser, it is the deep moral earnestness of what he writes, as well as the spiritual vision which fills his mind—it is these that reflect the idealism of the Bible. There is ever in Spenser, even where his imagination is weaving its spell over the scene, a quiet touch of Puritanism. It was, as Green has said, the sense of "moral sternness and elevation which England was drawing from the Reformation and the Bible."[2] Observing in Spenser the moral seriousness whence all his conceptions sprang, we are not

[2] *A Short History of the English People,* Chapter VII, Section VII, "The Elizabethan Poets."

surprised that the great Puritan poet of the next generation should have described him as "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas." We cannot doubt that he had read and profoundly meditated upon the Bible.

When we come to consider Shakespeare's relation to the Bible, the evidence is very pronounced. Not merely is it the spirit of the Scripture that haunts his mind, but it is the very wording of Scripture as well. If only we could know the story of his early life, and his home environment! Imagination is tempted to reconstruct it. One sees a home where the small household Bible, the Genevan version, had found a welcome. The discipline of such a home perhaps required attention to the Book, but we should suppose that such discipline would not be necessary. It was practically a new book, and the curiosity of active minds, unaccustomed to such rich and varied material, would be motive enough to inspire interest. The alert mind of a growing boy in such a home, already, as we suppose, alive with interest in the dramatic presentations of Scripture at Coventry, would require no whip to create interest in such a book as the Bible. It is interesting to contemplate the opportunities afforded him to acquaint himself with the Scripture. The home and the school may be thought of as cooperating in this. We may think of him as growing up in the companionship of the Bible, becoming familiar with its persons, scenes and incidents, learning its language and style, imbibing its spirit of dramatic life and action, and most of all, drinking in its air of largeness, of inspiration, of creativeness, and of imaginative power.

If we have witnessed in our own day the making

of young minds through contact with the creative qualities of the Bible, why may we not justly conceive it to have been so with so keen a mind as that of the boy of Stratford-on-Avon? In fact an additional reason is found for such a supposition in the novelty of the Book in its English form. To be sure the church for generations had brought the Scripture to the attention of the people—but with what a handicap of language and of other interrupting agencies. Here at length was a whole Bible in the hands of the people! It is for us quite impossible to conceive of a boy Shakespeare who would not pore over its pages, and drink copiously of its inspiration. For him there was no humdrum, no weariness, no penalty, in such an occupation. His contact with the Bible must rather have been marked by eager and spirited imagination, and by those awakened and constructive powers which lie at the command of genius.

However imaginative this reconstruction of the poet's early environment may be, some such supposition is necessary to meet the situation as we find it in Shakespeare's own pages. For when we come to examine his writings, we find abundant evidence on every hand of his familiarity with the Bible. We find that his knowledge is not casual and accidental, like that of one who has touched it lightly, and with indifference. Rather we are compelled to believe that his acquaintance with Scripture was that of easy familiarity and of sympathetic interest. The thoughts of Scripture appear to be running through his mind, and the very language of the Book comes readily to his pen. Observing with what ease and aptness he makes use of the Bible, one cannot resist the impres-

sion that he had read the Good Book with an open mind, and had fully appreciated the value of its literary material.

Its incidents, persons, scenes, and idioms had lodged themselves in his memory. When he refers to the Bible, it is done naturally and without effort—he does not strain his point, he does not drag his references in by force. We mean, in other words, that Shakespeare seems to be at home in the Bible, like one in modern days, who, having read the Bible from childhood, thinks naturally in terms of the Bible, and speaks and writes with recurrent Biblical tropes and illustrations. When Hamlet says,

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will"—
>
> * * * * *
>
> "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow,"

we see that the author has easy and friendly conversance with the Bible. Its language comes readily to the tip of his pen. These are not labored quotations, but easy and felicitous examples of how the thought of Scripture affects the imagination of men when they speak and write.

From the abundance of Shakespeare's references to the Bible there is warrant for saying that his mind was fairly saturated with the Scripture. Whether he was in the full sense a Christian believer, cannot be decided from what he has written. His constant use of the Bible to enforce and illustrate his thoughts argues that he believed at least in its literary power. We cannot resist the conclusion that he went much farther and accepted its authority for human con-

duct. There is often an air of finality in the way he uses the Bible, as in *Macbeth*—

"In the great hand of God I stand;"

and in *The Merchant of Venice,*

"My deeds upon my head;"

and in *Richard II,*

"Water cannot wash away your sin."

This power of prerogative in Scripture is a familiar sign of its influence in literature. There is nothing so suitable for the conclusion of a matter as a good strong word of the Bible.[3]

It is somewhat remarkable, with the generations of study that have been given to the bard of Avon, that fuller recognition has not been taken of his indebtedness to the Scripture. It is true that Bishop Wordsworth[4] and many others have dealt generously with the subject; yet with those who treat the poet from a literary standpoint it is quite too common to ignore the connection of the Bible with his literary excellence. They can readily detect his dependence upon historical sources, and they are quick to observe traces of the influence of other writers in the excellence of his speech, but they are slow to take note of the way in which the Bible has poured out of its rich store upon

[3] An Old Light minister in Scotland once said to Dr. Wm. M. Taylor: "There is nothing like a good hard Psalm." No doubt he was thinking of the sense of finality in Scripture, of which writers often avail themselves.

[4] The full title of Bishop Wordsworth's volume is, *On Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible.*

his pages. It is not uncommon for critics in this summary fashion to ignore the influence of the Bible on literature. Thus Lowell says of Chaucer[5] that, "there are four principal sources from which Chaucer may be presumed to have drawn for poetical suggestion—the Latins, the Troubadours, the Trouvères, and the Italians." It is strange that so discriminating a critic as Lowell should not have been willing to say that Chaucer also drank deeply from the well of Scripture.

In the case of Shakespeare the dependence is so obvious as to have obtained from Emerson the verdict, "Shakespeare leans upon the Bible." His mind is saturated with Scripture. He thinks naturally in the terms of Scripture. These are the marks of one who has read and absorbed the Bible. Indeed so close is the resemblance of Shakespeare to the Bible in quality and tone that memory sometimes stumbles and we ask, "Is this from the one or the other?" To take the Bible out of Shakespeare would leave not merely a great gap—it would leave a deep wound in the side. The Bible is woven in with the very texture of the immortal plays. If the Bible were lost, much of its language and incident, together with much of its spirit, would be preserved to us in Shakespeare.

His most obvious use of Scripture is that of allusion and reference—this by way of simple illustration, comparison, or enforcement. It is in this manner that persons whose minds are richly fed with Biblical material make use of it to illuminate their conversation. It is so much a part of their normal thought and experience that almost without realizing it they utter

[5] *My Study Windows.*

themselves in Biblical language. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life"—this statement of Jesus finds a practical illustration in the case of every one who voices his thoughts naturally and sincerely in the language of Scripture.

How easily Shakespeare does this might be proved by many examples. "Slanderous as Satan," "Poor as Job," "As wicked as his wife," "Goliath with a weaver's beam," "A kissing traitor," "Another Golgotha," "We are sinners all," "Rude am I in speech," "Dives that lived in purple," "As ragged as Lazarus," "The penalty of Adam," "Life is a shuttle," "The house with the narrow gate," "Jacob's staff," "False as water"—brief as these allusions are, they are not merely casual. They indicate a mind that had learned to lean in its thinking upon forms and rubrics of the Scripture. Here in the simplest and most rudimentary way we observe the entrance of the Bible into literature. The significant thing is that the Bible is such a vital book that when men are thinking earnestly and clearly they are apt to claim its aid in expressing themselves.

There is another large class of passages in which the poet does more than merely allude or refer to Scripture—he weaves it into his own narrative and adapts it to his needs. Thus in *The Merchant of Venice*—

> "A Daniel come to judgment! Yea, a Daniel.
> O wise young Judge, how I do honor thee."

Speaking of the Duke of Gloster's death, in *King Richard II*, the poet makes apt use of the story of Cain and Abel—

"Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth
To me for justice, and rough chastisement."

When the King says in *Hamlet,*

"O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven,
It hath the primal eldest curse upon it—
A brother's murder"—

not only is the entire Old Testament story brought to mind, but an application is also made. Falstaff apologizes to Prince Henry for his delinquencies—

"Dost thou hear, Hal? Thou knowest in the state of innocency
Adam fell,
And what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of
villainy?"

In *As You Like It* we find a happy coupling of allusions and a spiritual application as well—

"He that doth the ravens feed,
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,
Be comfort to my age."

What could be more apt and convincing than King Richard's taunt to the enemies who are pressing him?—

"Tho' some of you with Pilate wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin."

This is more than mere allusion, it is embryo sermon.

Like many authors Shakespeare had his favorite Biblical illustrations. Thus the story of Judas'

treachery appealed to him, and he made frequent use of it in different plays—

"Who can call him his friend that dips in the same dish?"
—*Timon of Athens.*

"So Judas kiss'd his master, and cried
All hail! when as he meant all harm."
—*III Henry VI.*

"His kisses are Judas's own children."
—*As You Like It.*

"Be yok'd with his that did betray the Best."
—*Winter's Tale.*

'Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas."
—*Richard II.*

"I kissed thee, ere I kill'd thee."
—*Othello.*

Beside such instances of the concise use of Scripture, there are other instances where the poet has not hesitated to make very extended use of Biblical material. An excellent example of this is in the famous conversation between Shylock and Antonio,[6] where the Jew avails himself of Jacob's usury in defense of himself—

"When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep."

The discussion lengthens to nearly a score of lines, in which the story of Jacob's device with the flock is brought out. Says Shylock apologetically,

"This was a way to thrive, and he was blest."

It is in this connection that the poet puts into the mouth of Antonio a reference to the Savior's tempta-

[6] *The Merchant of Venice,* Act I, Sc. 3.

tion, that shows the range of his acquaintance with the Bible, and his quickness in linking parts together—

> "Mark you this, Bassanio,
> The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

Another instance of the extended use of Scripture is that of Jephthah's daughter in *Hamlet*. Hamlet addresses Polonius as Jephthah—

> Hamlet. "O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!"
> Polonius. "What a treasure had he, my lord?"
> Hamlet. "Why,
> 'One fair daughter, and no more,
> The which he loved passing well.'"
> Polonius (*aside*). "Still on my daughter."
> Hamlet. "Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?"

It is not necessary for the poet to do more than suggest the story. The application is apparent in the mind of Hamlet.

Shakespeare also makes very frequent use of the historical facts of the Bible. A fair outline of Old Testament history is contained in his writings. The creation, the temptation, the fall, the story of Cain and Abel, the flood, the patriarchal histories, Job, Pharaoh, Samson, David, Nebuchadnezzar, and many other familiar names of Scripture figure in his pages. From Adam to Jesus and His apostles scarcely an important character is omitted, while many of the principal incidents of Scriptural history are employed. There are, for example, as many as eight different instances where Shakespeare makes use of the story of Cain and Abel.[7] The parable of the Prodigal Son is used in five plays. Analogies between Shake-

[7] *The Bible in Shakespeare*, William Burgess, p. 87.

speare's plots and the stories of the Bible have often been noted. One of the most remarkable of these resemblances is that of Macbeth to the story of Ahab and Jezebel.

We should naturally expect that the poet would make frequent references to the story of redemption. Such indeed is the case. These references are often to the bare history, as in this—

"So Judas did to Christ."

But more often his use of the facts of redemption involves doctrinal ideas, as in the beautiful picture of Christ in Palestine—

"In those holy fields,
Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet,
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nail'd
For our advantage, on the bitter cross."[8]

Few passages in English literature can be named in which so much of the vital truth of Christianity is comprised as in this passage. Here, beside stating in a few words the doctrine of the atonement, the poet succeeds in fixing our thought first upon the personality of the Redeemer, next upon the environment in which He lived, and finally upon the sorrow of His Cross! We cannot help feeling that Shakespeare's references to the redemptive truth of the Gospel are singularly tender and effective. Thus he speaks of—

"The precious image of our dear Redeemer."

And again of—

"Your Master,
Whose minister you are, whiles here he lived
Upon this naughty earth."

[8] *I Henry IV*, Act. I, Sc. 1.

And again—

> "I charge you as you hope to have redemption
> By Christ's dear blood, shed for our grievous sins."

Not even the fervency of these utterances is sufficient to prove the poet's personal faith. Nevertheless one can have no doubt of Shakespeare's perfect familiarity and sympathy with the Gospel narratives.

But Shakespeare is more profoundly dependent upon Scripture than we have yet indicated. It is not merely in his allusions and references that we find the deepest influence of the Bible in the making of these wonderful plays. Rather it is in the saturation of his pages with Scriptural thoughts, themes and ideals, that we find the strongest mark of Biblical influence. We have already mentioned his use of the redemptive facts of the Gospel of Christ. On the general subject of God's rule the poet is very explicit—he believes in Providence.

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

This conception of an over-ruling mind is a controlling thought with the poet. Therefore he teaches retribution for sin, and the need of repentance and faith. Shakespeare is dealing constantly with the age-long problem of the contest between Good and Evil, and it may be said that his handling of the problem is in general profoundly Biblical. Every one of the tragedies is a brief for the Biblical doctrines of sin, retribution and atonement. "It is in this austere conception of a moral equilibrium disturbed by wilful sin

and foolish passion that Shakespeare's religious sentiments most powerfully disclose themselves."[9]

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,"

says Hamlet, and in this single line the poet sets forth the weakness of guilt, and the penalty of inward unworthiness.

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain."

The whole tragic history of the seared and spoiled moral life of man cries out in these words of Richard III. The poet holds sternly to the Biblical ideal of inevitable justice. Henry VI asks—

"Can we outrun the heavens?"

In the world's uneven ways, wrong may "shove by justice,"

"but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence."[10]

Could there be a more thorough statement of the Scriptural doctrine of judgment?[11] Shakespeare believes irretrievably in the "moral framework" of the

[9] *Atonement in Literature and Life*, Charles A. Dinsmore, p. 90.

[10] *Hamlet*, Act III, Sc. 3.

[11] See *The Great Poets and Their Theology*, A. H. Strong, p. 204.

world, and where sin disturbs the equilibrium there must be repentance and expiation.[12]

"What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"

cries Lady Macbeth.

"Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

Her discovery of the need of an expiation that reaches deeper than the skin—is it not the ever-present necessity for atonement to which the Bible furnishes in Christ's redemption the only adequate answer?

Shakespeare's ethical use of Scripture is also very impressive. It is not necessary always that he should quote the words of the Bible—he is constantly drawing upon its moral values. He is above all else a student of the soul, and in this he welcomes the aid of the Scripture as an authoritative standard of human conduct. We have seen how strong a believer he is in the certainty of punishment for sin. *Henry VIII* is the only one of the great dramas in which the sins of the chief sinner do not bring on a visible judgment.[13] There are objectionable scenes and characters in the plays. Taine objects that the poet should have made "a lewd rascal, a pothouse poet," like Falstaff, one of his prime favorites. Nevertheless the total effect of Shakespeare's painting of human character is toward moral elevation. He is on the side of morality, for he sees that morality springs from the

[12] *Atonement in Literature and Life,* Charles A. Dinsmore, p. 101.

[13] *The Bible in Shakespeare,* William Burgess, p. 85.

heart of God, and is deep-seated in our human frame. "The great dramatist was both pure in his moral teaching and singularly sound in faith."[14]

A single example of the poet's high moral tone may be cited. It is all the more remarkable since it is the final judgment of such an one as Cardinal Wolsey, the most subtle and talented of all Shakespeare's offenders against right and justice, on the subject of human conduct.

"Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by't?
Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee:
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not:
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's, and truth's: then, if thou fall'st, O Cromwell,
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr!"[15]

Throughout this solemn charge we seem to hear echoes of much that we have learned in the Word of God.

It is the tone and coloring of Scripture which more than anything else produce in Shakespeare his high moral excellence. When Polonius speaks a farewell to his son, he uses, not the language, but the sentiment of Scripture—

"Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
* * * * *

[14] *The Great Poets and Their Theology,* A. H. Strong, p. 210.

[15] *Henry VIII,* Act III, Sc. 2.

Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice:
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.

* * * * *

This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

It is stated by those who have taken pains to reckon up the number that Shakespeare's writings contain more than twelve hundred references to the Bible. But this list, as we have tried to point out, does not exhaust our subject. The poet's dependence upon the Holy Scripture is far deeper and wider. There is much wealth of poetical thought and imagery which he appears to have borrowed more or less directly from the Bible. And besides it must be evident to any sympathetic reader that his mind is freshened and inspired constantly by the current of Scripture running through it. Shakespeare is so deeply read in the Bible as to have absorbed it in his intellectual and moral frame. To take out of his plays their deep Biblical strain, their Scriptural tone and color, their flavor and fragrance of the Garden of Spices in which his feet had walked, would be like expunging the colors of the rainbow, or separating the fragrance and beauty of the rose.

XV

THE PURITANS

"It (Puritanism) has left an abiding mark in politics and religion, but its great monuments are the prose of Bunyan and the verse of Milton."

Lowell.

HISTORY has frequently misrepresented the Puritans; yet Lord Macaulay declares that they were "the most remarkable body of men perhaps which the world has ever produced;"[1] while Douglas Campbell affirms that Puritanism is "the greatest moral and political force of modern times;"[2] and Thomas Carlyle believes that "at bottom perhaps no nobler Heroism ever transacted itself on this Earth."[3] The Puritans have been caricatured and ridiculed, and their very name has been made a synonym for the reactionary. The satirist and the dramatist have busied themselves with their peculiarities—in truth they have proved an easy mark for stage-invective. "The ostentatious simplicity of their dress, their sour aspect, their nasal twang, their stiff posture, their long graces, their Hebrew names, the

[1] "Essay on Milton."

[2] *The Puritan in Holland, England and America,* Vol. I, XXIII.

[3] *Letters and Speeches of Cromwell.* Introduction.

Scriptural phrases which they introduced on every occasion, their contempt of human learning, their detestation of polite amusements, were indeed game for the laughers." "But," as Macaulay adds, "it is not from the laughers alone that the philosophy of history is to be learnt."

Whatever their faults and foibles, it is certain that history would have to be re-written, if the Puritans were left out. They lived in times when forceful men were needed for great and important duties. If they were austere, rugged, unyielding; if their theology was at times extravagant, even absurd; if their standards of conduct were frequently so other-worldly as to be outlandish—nevertheless the Lord gave them a strong nail in His holy place. Their mission was a great one, and the debt which men owe to them is scarcely less than world-wide. We can grant a few eccentricities to men whose function it was to secure the religious and civil liberties of the world; we can afford to suffer some disappointments in men who were appointed to rest the destiny of the world's democracies upon Divine Sovereignty.[4]

> "The slandered Calvinists of Charles' time,
> Who fought, and won it, Freedom's holy fight."

The passion for popular education, which is found today among English-speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic, is an inheritance from the Puritans. Speaking of the New England school-house, which he

[4] "It was to this sect, whose principles appear so frivolous and habits so ridiculous, that the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution." Hume's *History of England*, Chap. XI.

locates picturesquely "in the midst of a piece of woods where four roads meet," Lowell declares that "this little building, and others like it, were an original kind of fortification invented by the founders of New England, . . . the great discovery of our Puritan forefathers."[5] If our literature, as Hazlitt says, is Gothic, not uniformly beautiful, but "of great weight in the whole,"[6] we must account that much of its strength is Puritan in origin and form.

It was the Puritan's profound sense of a Higher Power that gave him preeminence among men. If this produced on the one side a feeling of great self-abasement, on the other side it produced a strong sense of personal assurance and courage. Men who believed in every fibre of their being that God was with them in their battles for truth and justice and freedom were not apt to show themselves weaklings in any human conflict. Despite their vagaries, there were in the Puritanic temper a certain height and grandeur, a certain grand orderliness and seriousness, a certain imperative of moral and spiritual force, that are nothing less than sublime.

The Puritan was nourished on the Bible.[7] It was his meat and drink, food alike to his faith and his imagination, unfailing source both of his lofty idealism, and of his strenuous endeavor. It was the Old

[5] *Among My Books.* Essay on "New England Two Centuries Ago," James Russell Lowell.

[6] *Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth,* W. Hazlitt. Lect. I.

[7] "Wherever we find them, either in England or America, we find in their possession the school-book and the Bible." *The Puritan in Holland, England and America,* Douglas Campbell, Vol. I, p. 458.

Testament especially that furnished him with images and norms of thought. Its note of struggle and resistance against the oppressor, its record of wilderness wandering and of Divine light and guidance, appealed to him. The Old Testament was a living book to men who looked forward to a Promised Land in their own day.

They thought in terms of Biblical trouble and Biblical victory. "The English translation of the Bible had to a very great degree Judaized, not the English mind, but the Puritan temper. . . . It was convenient to see Amalek or Philistia in the men who met them in the field, and one unintelligible horn or other of the Beast in their theological opponents."[8] Cromwell wrote to a relative: "I live in Meshec, which they say signifies Prolonging; in Kedar, which signifies blackness; yet the Lord forsaketh me not. Though He do prolong, yet He will, I trust, bring me to His tabernacle." This is an excellent example of how the terminology of the Old Testament was suited to the Puritan temper. When the Puritans, as Macaulay tells us, "baptized their children by the names, not of Christian saints, but of Hebrew patriarchs and warriors," they gave such a testimony to their high opinion of the Old Testament as is not to be doubted.

Above all else it was the Psalms that appealed to them and found ready play in their stern imaginations. If they failed to understand such a text as, "I have piped to you and ye have not danced," they had no difficulty whatsoever with the words of the Psalmist—"Blessed be Jehovah my rock, who teacheth my hands

[8] *Among My Books.* Essay on Milton, James Russell Lowell.

to war, and my fingers to fight." "In the poetry of Milton, in the mental history of Bunyan," writes Prothero, "the power of the Psalms is strongly marked. Their influence is still more clearly seen in the career of Oliver Cromwell, the foremost figure in the stirring times of the Puritan revolution, the strongest type of the stern religion which raised him to the summit of fame and fortune. The spirit that he read into the Psalms governed his actions at each supreme crisis of his stormy life: the most striking stages in his career are marked by quotations from the Psalms: in his private letters, his public dispatches, his addresses to Parliament, the imagery, metaphors, and language of the Psalms drop from his lips, or from his pen, as if by constant meditation he had made their phraseology a part of his very life."[9] When the sun rose over St. Abb's Head on the morning of the battle of Dunbar, Cromwell cried out in triumph in the words of the Psalmist—"Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered."

It is difficult at this distant day to realize what a change had taken place in England in respect to the Bible. It was but a short time since the yeomen of Wyclif's day were willing to give a load of hay for a few chapters of an epistle in English. In the time of which we now write England was full of Bibles. The Puritans "took their Bibles with them to the marketplace and to the workshop, and bought and sold with its words on their lips and in their hearts. It was their guide in every part of their life; and when duty called them to take up arms, they charged the enemy with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon in their

[9] *The Psalms in Human Life,* Rowland E. Prothero, p. 250.

hands, and singing David's Psalms."[10] Version after version, edition after edition, had appeared, and had left a mark upon the life of England. During the reign of Elizabeth no fewer than one hundred and thirty distinct issues of Bibles and Testaments passed through the press. About ninety of these issues were of the Genevan version, which, as we have already explained, was the household version, being of small size and easy to handle.[11] This was an average of three editions a year; enough probably to supply nearly every Protestant family in the realm.

It is apparent that we must therefore contemplate a state of society in Puritan days that was thoroughly permeated by the Scripture. Yet the newness of England's ownership of the Bible was by no means worn away—it was still a new Book to the people of Elizabeth's day and beyond. Indeed it must have been to the average Englishman of that day the only literature that was freely accessible to him. If we can conceive of a community life that lived and moved and had its being in the Bible, we shall not be far wrong in our estimate of the relation of Puritanism to the Word of God. "They were to do God's work; to do it, they must know His will, and that will was laid down in the Bible. Duty the object of life, and the Bible its rule. That was the key-note of the Puritanism which was to revolutionize England and found a New England across the ocean."[12]

[10] *Our Grand Old Bible,* William Muir, p. 179.

[11] *Annals of the English Bible,* Christopher Andersen, Vol. II, pp. 353, 360.

[12] *The Puritan in England, Holland and America,* Douglas Campbell, Vol. II, pp. 137, 8.

One must try to realize this situation as vividly as possible in order to understand how much is implied in Macaulay's statement that the books that have been written in the languages of Western Europe during the last two hundred and fifty years "are of greater value than all the books which at the beginning of that period were extant in the world."[13] The historian is not speaking of the influence of the English Bible, but it is a remarkable fact that the period defined in this statement is just the period in which English-speaking people have been in full possession of the Bible in their own tongue. Puritanism committed many extravagances; it was guilty of many faults of emphasis. Nevertheless it succeeded in grounding the life of England very thoroughly on the Bible; it produced a fuller saturation of the English mind with the Word of God. The Puritan might make many false applications of the teaching of Scripture; his emphasis might frequently be upon the wrong point. At the same time the power of the Bible flowed into and through him and from him.

To conceive of the Puritan without his Bible would be to do violence both to history and logic. To him it was writ large with divine reality and power, with prophetic audacity and vision, with the imperative of purpose and courage. Liberty was no ordinary thing with him—it sprang from the heart of God. He was a mystic in the sense that he was always face to face with the great verities of Eternity and Human Destiny: but his mysticism had a practical everyday value —he faced the problems of his day quite as much as the problems of the spiritual realm.

[13] "Essay on Lord Bacon."

The great days of Elizabeth gave to the world a mighty tradition of faith and venture. For the most part this is a Puritan inheritance, and the world is richer to this hour for the strain of heroism and spiritual adventure which came from the Puritan. Puritanism as an order of society soon declined and passed away. But it had left a deep deposit of influence. To this day it is felt in a certain exaltation and grandeur of thought, a certain broadening and deepening of men's feelings. The hand of the Puritan is still upon us as we think and write. His vagaries have long since passed out of sight: his power has remained. And his power was mediated to him through the Bible.

Strange to say, one of the richest gifts of Puritanism to the world of literature is its gift of imagination. Lord Macaulay is authority for the statement that "though there were many clever men in England during the latter half of the seventeenth century, there were only two minds which possessed the imaginative faculty in a very eminent degree. One of those minds produced the *Paradise Lost*, the other *The Pilgrim's Progress*."[14]

John Milton was born five years after the death of Queen Elizabeth. He was eight years old when Shakespeare died. He inherited the best things of the Elizabethan age: he was the highest type of Puritanism. He had the Puritan intensity and fervor, and a very exalted sense of moral worth and beauty. "If ever God instilled an intense love of moral beauty," he

[14] Essay on Southey's *The Pilgrim's Progress, with a Life of John Bunyan.*

said, "into the mind of any man, he has instilled it into mine."

In Milton we see the flower of Puritanism: he had much of the austerity, and he had also the vision and the imagination. It has been many times proved that long and deep conversance with the Bible ultimately brings forth fruit in the imagination. It was inevitable that the deep impregnation of the English mind in the Scripture that took place in the Puritan regime would result in a new birth of constructive literature. Wordsworth held that even simple and uneducated minds, fed on the English Bible as staple food, will insensibly acquire a vivid and majestic speech peculiarly fitted for the uses of poetry. In his notes to the *Bigelow Papers* Mr. Lowell shows how the "sinewy and expressive diction" of the Bible had become a part of the Puritan fibre.[15]

The mark left by Puritanism upon the politics and religion of the world is very strong. Its greatest monuments, however, as Lowell tells us, are the prose of Bunyan and the verse of Milton.[16] The Puritans might offend by their straining after Biblical phraseology: nevertheless their ears and hearts were open to the real sound of Scripture. Unconsciously they were preparing in their midst for the coming of a great imaginative mind like that of Milton, whose service to literature should be distinctly a Biblical service. For although Milton followed classical models, the source of his materials as of his inspiration was the Bible. The intense zeal for righteous-

[15] See this discussed more fully in the present author's volume, *The Fascination of the Book*, pp. 147, 8.

[16] *Among My Books.* "Essay on Milton."

ness which was characteristic of the Puritans, and which grew out of their strong convictions about the character of God, and the authority of Scripture, found in Milton an uncompromising advocate.

Milton's early intention was to take a romantic subject for his major poem—for this he had almost turned to the story of King Arthur. But as he grew older, the claims of the Bible grew more insistent, and he determined to "justify the ways of God to men," by attempting in verse the tremendous story of man's loss through sin, and his eternal gain through salvation. The result is beyond all doubt the greatest single contribution of epic poetry that English genius has given to the world. That the Bible should have furnished the motive for such a poem is significant of its great place in English history.

The poet turns to the Bible in his first words—

> "Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us and regain the blissful seat,
> Sing heav'nly Muse."

With what a magnificent sweep of imagination he carries us in these opening words of *Paradise Lost* from Genesis to Revelation!

Matthew Arnold selects Milton as the truest English representative of what he calls the "grand style." It is, he thinks, the influence of the great classic models that has produced this style: the spirit of antiquity breathes through his lines. It is amazing that critics will employ many pages in analyzing the sources of Milton's majestic literary power, and

never think to mention the fact that his whole life was spent in the atmosphere of a Book that is not only provocative of thought, but also constructive of modes of expression. We venture to suggest therefore that Milton's "grand style" was formed quite as much upon the model of the Scripture as upon that of classic writings.

The language and incident of Scripture of course abound in the *Paradise Lost*—

> "Meanwhile
> The world should burn, and from her ashes spring
> New heav'n and earth, wherein the just shall dwell."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "The stairs were such as whereon Jacob saw
> Angels ascending and descending, bands
> Of guardians bright."

Such apt references as these are to be found on page after page of Milton—not in the Paradise poems only, but in others also. Thus in "Lycidas"—

> "So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
> Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves."

It is not sufficient to say that Milton's music is that of the Italian Renaissance and the classic models which it furnished. The deepest notes in his music are echoes of the Word of God. He has caught in his very style the majesty of the Scripture. The solemn grandeur and dignity of the Bible, the profound sense of things invisible and other-worldly, have somehow transferred themselves to his pages. One feels in his language itself a strong pulse-beat of spiritual power. Only long meditation upon the thoughts and images of the Scripture could have given him this spiritualizing and transforming power of language. It is the dis-

tinctive quality of those writers, whether they be believers or not, who have taken sacred fire from God's altars.

It is, however, in the sweep and quality of Milton's imagination that we recognize the wider influence of the Bible upon him. A single hint of the Bible about the war in heaven[17] is enough for his creative genius, and upon this he gathers the entire fabric of his *Paradise Lost.* It is the Puritan conception of the vast struggle between Good and Evil, a struggle which has constituted the tragedy, not alone of the world, but of the universe. Milton stages the contest as only one who had read and profoundly appreciated the Scripture could do. It is the problem of the stupendous spiritual catastrophe that has overtaken humanity that occupies his mind—

> "What cause
> Moved our grand Parents in that happy state,
> Favor'd of heaven so highly, to fall off
> From their Creator, and trangress his will."[18]

Milton's answer carries us in imagination back to an undated period, before "the mother of mankind" was deceived in the garden, when He who became her Tempter himself yielded to temptation—

> "and with ambitious aim
> Against the throne and monarchy of God
> Raised impious war in heav'n, and battle proud,
> With vain attempt."

This is the poet's philosophy of the Fall—the Fall of Man was preluded by the Fall of an Angel. Our human rebellion is linked with the warfare in heaven.

[17] Revelation 12:7. [18] Book I.

Milton could not, of course, permit his great Epic of the Fall to remain alone. The *Paradise Regained* was its natural sequel. In this the poet in reality stages the Temptation of Jesus, not the story of the Cross. "The devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."[19] The poet's imagination seizes upon these words and makes them the text of *Paradise Regained.* If Paradise was lost through man's disobedience, which itself sprang from an angel's ambition and fall, Paradise can only be regained through the obedience of man, which in turn finds the true quality of victory in the victory of the Son of Man over temptation.

No preacher in all Christendom has ever preached so powerful a sermon on the value of Christ's victory over temptation as does Milton. The glory of Athens and Rome, even the splendors of Parthia, are not sufficient to call our Savior away from his benevolent purpose of redemption. Only One who was "tempted in all points like as we are" could avail to help us in winning back our lost inheritance—

> "Now thou hast avenged
> Supplanted Adam, and by vanquishing
> Temptation, hast regain'd lost Paradise."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "Hail Son of the Most High, heir of both worlds,
> Queller of Satan, on thy glorious work
> Now enter, and begin to save mankind."

Of Milton's "Samson Agonistes" James Russell

[19] Matthew 4: 8, 9.

Lowell declares that our language has no finer poem than this—"a tragedy on a Greek model with the blinded Samson for its hero."[20]

> "Promise was that I
> Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;
> Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him
> Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves."

The poet seizes upon the moment of Samson's humiliating captivity and blindness—a pathetic touch of autobiography—and proceeds to dramatize the situation in his own vivid manner. The Preface to the poem written by Milton himself contains his vindicaiton of Tragedy as a form of dramatic art, and his apology, written with his Puritan brethren in mind, for the use of stage effects. The poem is a noble forerunner of a long list of dramatic writings inspired by persons or incidents of the Scripture.[21]

A severer contrast cannot be imagined than that between John Milton and John Bunyan. Yet they are alike in their dependence upon the Word of God—alike also in the literary glory which for all time they must share with one another. Yet although their names are linked together as the two greatest imaginative minds of their century, the lesser of the two, with the flight of years, has grown to be the greater. Milton's "grand organ peal," mighty as it is, is not so appealing, so human and persuasive, as the simple and un-

[20] *Among My Books.* "Essay on Milton."

[21] A recent example of the dramatic use of Scriptural material is *The House of Rimmon,* by Henry van Dyke, based upon the story of Naaman the Syrian captain who was cured of leprosy.

affected voice of the tinker of Elstow,—who described himself after the manner of the prophet Amos—"I am no poet, nor poet's son, but a mechanic."[22]

As to teachers and education he said, "I never went to school to Plato or Aristotle," reminding us of the apostle's claim for himself, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me."[23] As for books, he knew *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven,* and *The Practise of Piety;* also he was well acquainted with Foxe's *Book of Martyrs,* which influenced him not a little. One more book completes the list, and that is the English Bible, in the atmosphere of which more than any man of his time or ours, Bunyan lived and worked all the years of his preaching and writing. If a simple and convincing answer be sought for Bunyan's power, his literary preeminence, his influence throughout the generations, his style, his genius for simple and effective dramatization, not to speak of his spiritual effectiveness, the answer is found in one word—the Bible!

"His language was not ours:
'Tis my belief, God spake:
No tinker has such powers."

That Bunyan had natural gifts of his own cannot be denied. He was no doubt endowed with an original genius. Moreover it is quite apparent that he was highly imaginative in temper, and quick to seize upon analogies of the world and the Kingdom. He was a

[22] "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees. And Jehovah took me from following the flock." Amos 7: 14, 15.
[23] Galatians 1: 17.

man of the people, and of common toil: and he possessed to an unusual degree the secret of those simplicities of thought and utterance which seem to go with the soil and with workman's tools. It is not necessary to prove that the tinker was ungifted and boorish—he was far from it.

An imagination such as his was fertile soil for Scriptural seed. To him the Bible was the most real of all books. Its persons, scenes, and incidents took hold upon him with such power as to become the subject matter of all his thinking. Life in terms of the Scripture seemed to him a pilgrimage with the City of Destruction as the point of departure, and the Celestial City as the goal to be reached. The Bible furnished the material for the experiences of the pilgrim on the way. The picture that he drew was no more than a rescript, an interpretation, of that vast conflict which is going on constantly between Good and Evil. The weapons of the warfare are Scriptural weapons, and the victory is a Scriptural victory. The service which Bunyan rendered is inestimable. He proved that the Bible is translatable into human experience: he showed that the faith, the decision, the emotion of the Christian life are truly constructive of life, and therefore of literature. His little book, *The Pilgrim's Progress,* is monumental in the history of literature. The poet Whittier said of it, "the infidel himself would not willingly let it die."

"There is no book in our literature on which we would so readily stake the fame of the old unpolluted English language, no book which shows so well how rich that language is in its own proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has bor-

rowed."[24] This is rare praise which the historian gives to Bunyan's poor little book—poor in outward form, but rich in thought and power. The same writer speaks of Bunyan's *Holy War* as "the best allegory that ever was written," with the exception of *Pilgrim's Progress*: and *Grace Abounding* he describes as "one of the most remarkable pieces of autobiography in the world."

Bunyan knew nothing of English literature: the schools contributed nothing to his power. He dipped his pen in the liquid sympathy and power of the Bible and wrote—the result was a masterpiece. The simplicity of its style, the wealth of its imagination, the humanness of its narrative, have been the marvel of students ever since. Bunyan, with his gifted imagination, saw in the Bible a panorama of the Kingdom, and thus he wrote, his heart, his imagination, on fire with what he saw and felt. Milton adapted a classical form to Biblical materials, but he never quite succeeded in divorcing himself from the abstract. Bunyan on the contrary gave "to the abstract the interest of the concrete." He took the same Biblical material and made it live before the very eyes of the people. Certain of his characters can never be forgotten. Greatheart, Pliable, Faithful, Worldly-Wiseman, Talkative and many more—are they not as our own friends and neighbors? The Pilgrim's Burden, the Hill Difficulty, the House of Interpreter, the Wicket Gate, the Roll, the Palace Beautiful, the Delectable Mountains, the Land of Beulah—how vivid and personal they are! Giant Despair, the Slough of

[24] Macaulay. Essay on Southey's *The Pilgrim's Progress, with a Life of John Bunyan.*

Despond, the Lions, the Valley of the Shadow—how real they are!

It is not merely that the Bible furnishes the author with his material—it is his inspiration. The Bible taught Bunyan to write. It is true that he brought to his task a quick imagination, nevertheless it was the saturation of his mind with the Scripture that gave exercise and direction to his imagination. Bunyan was, as Macaulay says, almost a "living concordance" of the Bible. It made him master of a clear, intelligible English style. It fed his imagination with rich and abundant food. It taught him the value of the story-narrative, and the fascination of romance and adventure. The old pilgrim idea of life "which had so often bloomed in the literature of all climes and ages," became in Bunyan's Biblical treatment of it a story sermon of such surpassing vividness and power as to make it one of the few great allegories of all time. "The pilgrimage is our own—in many of its phases at least—and we have met the people whom Bunyan saw in his dream, and are ourselves they whom he describes."[25]

It is a remarkable fact that the three great allegories of the world's literature, Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* Dante's *Divine Comedy,* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* sprang from imaginations that were profoundly influenced by the Bible. When a highly imaginative mind takes vital hold of spiritual facts and experiences with a desire to reproduce them in useful forms for the benefit of mankind, it is almost certain to turn to the Bible for the material of incident and illustra-

[25] Article on John Bunyan in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature,* Rev Edwin P. Parker, Vol. VII.

tion.[26] It is on this account that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* has been discriminatingly described as "the completest triumph of truth by fiction in all literature." Careful writers have even spoken of the tinker of Elstow as the father of the English novel. At least we may say that the English novel, which was the literary discovery of the next century, was in embryo in the immortal story of Bunyan's Pilgrim. It should not surprise us, therefore, to find later writers of English fiction down to the present time drawing heavily upon the Scripture. It is just now, for example, much in fashion with writers of fiction, to take even their titles from the Bible.[27]

A book that has been translated into almost every known language and dialect, that has been circulated freely by all communions both Romanist and Protestant, that has in truth proved "a religious bond to the whole of English Christendom"—such a book is not only a masterpiece of literature, it is also a monument to the literary influence of the Book from which it sprang. Such a book is Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* the most beautiful flower of Puritan emotion.

It would be useful, if our space permitted, to follow the strain of Puritanism in the later developments of English literature. If there are periods when the Puritan influence seems to have been wholly lost, later we discover that it was like a stream that runs underground for a time and then reappears. There

[26] See *English Literature in Account with Religion,* Edward M. Chapman, p. 500, for an interesting discussion of the dependence of fiction upon religion.

[27] *The House of Mirth, The Fruit of the Tree, The Valley of Decision,* three of Mrs. Edith Wharton's books, have Biblical titles.

can be no doubt that the Miltonic earnestness and seriousness, the glow of moral purpose and sincerity which we believe to be indigenous to English literature, are Puritanism in the blood. Strange to say, one of the best examples of the modern Puritan in English literature is Thomas Carlyle. He would have none of their forms in theology: nevertheless his intensity, his fervor, his moral earnestness, his tremendous idealism entitle him to rank among the great spiritual teachers of his day. He comes like a Hebrew prophet, with an Hebraic earnestness and intensity that are fairly irresistible. We see him reading the book of Job in the night-time and going to the window to look out over the sleeping city of London. The Bible spoke to him not in conventional ways—it gave him a message of mighty prerogative. Carlyle, like every other great English writer, dipped his pen, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the deep well of Scriptural earnestness and power, and wrote for men his gospel of work and duty and reality.

Puritanism also entered deeply into the making of literature in New England. Early extravagance of manner prevailed here as in the mother country. Yet here also the strength of Puritanism prevailed. The early New England household was nourished on the Bible. It is wholly impossible to account for the leadership of New England in American literature without recalling the indebtedness of the New England Puritans to the Bible. If it be true, as Lowell says, that New England "sits by every fireside in the land where there is piety, culture and free thought,"[28]

[28] *Among My Books.* Essay on "New England Two Centuries Ago."

let us not fail to observe that she has the Bible upon her lap.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is the truest modern representative of New England Puritanism, and his indebtedness to the Bible is manifest to all readers. His tone of intensity and seriousness, the Puritan sombreness of his imagination, the tendency to vex himself continually to account for the origin of evil,[29] these are strong marks of a mind that had consorted much with the Word of God. In a writer like Hawthorne, whatever his theme, the effects are apt to be moral.[30] At least the tone and color of his work are moral, and very often Biblical. This is notably true in *The Scarlet Letter.* A better example could not be given of the flowering-out of Puritanism in fiction than Hawthorne's *magnum opus.* We cannot conceive of an author writing a book of such intense moral power, apart from the influence of the Bible.[31]

[29] *New England Two Centuries Ago,* J. R. Lowell.

[30] Mr. Brander Matthews has contrasted Hawthorne with Poe. The latter's effects, he says, are physical.

[31] No one has written more instructively about the formative influence of the Bible in New England life than Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Old-Town Folks*—"After breakfast Grandfather conducted family prayers, commencing always by reading his chapter in the Bible. . . . Among the many insensible forces which formed the minds of New England children was this constant daily familiarity with the letter of the Bible. It was for the most part read twice a day in every family of any pretensions to respectability, and it was read as a reading-book in every common school, in both cases without any attempt at explanation. Such parts as explained themselves were left to do so. Such as were beyond our knowledge were still read and left to make what impression they would. For my part I am impatient of the theory of those who think that nothing that is not understood makes

any valuable impression on the mind of a child. I am certain that the constant contact of the Bible with my childish mind was a great mental stimulant, as it certainly was the cause of a singular and vague pleasure. The wild poetic parts of the prophecies, with their bold figures, vivid exclamations, and strange Oriental names and images, filled me with a quaint and solemn delight. Just as a child, brought up under the shadow of the great cathedrals of the Old World, wandering into them daily, at morning or eventide, beholding the many colored windows flamboyant with strange legends of saints and angels, and neither understanding the legends, nor comprehending the architecture, is yet stilled and impressed, till the old minster grows into his growth and fashions his nature, so this wonderful old cathedral book insensibly wrought a sort of mystical poetry into the otherwise hard and sterile life of New England. Its passionate Oriental phrases, its quaint pathetic stories, its wild, transcendent bursts of imagery, fixed an indelible mark in my imagination. Where Kedar and Tarshish and Pul and Lud, Chittim and the Isles, Dan and Beersheba, were, or what they were, I knew not, but they were fixed stations in my realm of cloud-land. I knew them as well as I knew my grandmother's rocking-chair, yet the habit of hearing of them only in solemn tones, and in the readings of religious hours, gave to them a mysterious charm. I think no New Englander brought up under the régime established by the Puritans, could really estimate how much of himself had actually been formed by this constant face-to-face intimacy with Hebrew literature." Pp. 265, 266.

XVI

THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH PROSE

"Intense study of the Bible will keep any writer from being vulgar in point of style."

Coleridge's *Table Talk.*

A PROFESSOR of English literature in one of our universities is authority for the statement that a process of enrichment and ennoblement of the English language has been going on for nearly thirteen hundred years, and that one of the chief agencies by which it has been effected is the influence, direct and indirect, of the Bible.[1]

From the days of Queen Elizabeth down to the present time there has been a certain effect of Biblical diction that has been clearly recognizable in English speakers and writers. There have, of course, been periods of extravagance in English style, when apparently the influence exercised by the English Bible upon writers was very slight. These stages of literary excrescence, however, have been invariably lived through, and English literature has returned to its normal simplicity and sanity.

A Biblical trend has all along manifested itself, especially in the prose utterance of English-speaking people. This has become in fact so much a rule and custom of English speech, that any unusual departure

[1] Albert S. Cook, Professor of the English Language and Literature in Yale University. See his volume entitled *The Bible and English Prose Style.* Introduction, p. IX.

in the way of complex or turgid style is set down at once as a violation of our traditions of speech. When Tennyson's son in the Biography speaks of the poet as giving the winter evenings of 1855 to translating the classics aloud into "Biblical prose," we understand what is meant. The characteristics of Biblical style are in fact quite familiar—they are such as simplicity, directness, concreteness, picturesqueness, and withal a certain dignity and stateliness, a grandeur and elevation—in short a kind of "noble naturalness"[2] that makes the Bible the easy companion of our inmost thought and need. These are more than mere literary qualities, they are the very life and breath of the Scripture, the outward reflection in waves of light of that inward life which the Lord affirmed to be resident in the Word. The impressive fact with which we are here concerned is that the Bible has been pouring these qualitative effects into English speech and writing for more than a thousand years.

This process of infiltration of thought and feeling into our language has been especially pronounced since the Bible appeared in full English dress. Saintsbury speaks of the authorized Version of the Bible in English as "the school and training-ground of every man and woman of English speech in the noblest uses of the English tongue."[3] Bowen says, "Only when your

[2] This is Prof. Cook's felicitous phrase to comprehend the leading characteristics of Biblical diction. He is thinking especially of the fourfold appeal of the Bible to sensibility, intellect, imagination and will. "It is the union of these in due proportions, which constitutes full and perfect naturalness, and such union we have in many parts of the Bible." *The Bible and English Prose Style.* Introduction, pp. XVI-XVIII.

[3] *History of Elizabethan Literature,* Chap. 6.

minds and memories have become saturated with the prose of our Common Version, with the phraseology of Shakespeare, and even, if one has command of French, with the neat succinctness, precision, and point of Pascal, will you have mastered the elements of a good English style."[4]

We are well aware that at this point we are dealing with complex influences that are not easily analyzed. The style and tone of English conversation, for example, no doubt represent a compound of effects, such as racial temperament, lingual inheritance, environment, even climate. It is impossible, however, to avoid the conclusion that the English Bible has had a very pronounced influence upon the prose style of conversation. The simplicity and directness of English talk are the natural sequence of long conversance with the English Bible. Men do not learn a stilted style from the Bible—rather they learn to speak simply and concretely. They know their point and when they speak they do not wander listlessly and aimlessly about, but take a straight course for a definite end. This effect of directness and simplicity in English speech has been so evident that many teachers of English have insisted upon the study of the Bible for this purpose.

But there are other effects of Biblical influence on conversation which are even more important. Persons who know the Bible intimately scarcely ever fail to betray a palpable lift or elevation of their style in speech. Their conversation is unconsciously heightened. There is an effect of "noble naturalness," of sanity, of spiritual impressiveness. We would not

[4] *A Layman's Study of the English Bible,* Chap. I.

labor this point over-much: but we are convinced that much reading of the Scripture tends to bring a haunting sense of spiritual life and reality into the conversation of men. At one time it is a touch of imagination, again it is a swift glimpse into an unknown realm, at another time it is a hint of something deep and wonderful, at still another time it is just the echo of a beautiful simplicity or a musical cadence in speech that strikes on all the chords of life. Thus men who know their English Bible will at times bring into conversation some quotation or allusion to the Scripture that "sets the mind in a flame and makes our hearts burn within us." More often they will without direct quotation lift the level of thought to some high Biblical frame, and open the mind to a feeling of moral weight and imperative, of vast tranquility, of unbounded depths of strength and endurance.

We are not here describing the conversation of the learned alone. Even ignorant men who have lingered long in the companionship of the Bible have become powerful in tongue or pen. It is told of a man in Exeter that he had "a way of dropping sentences that changed people's lives." No book is so well fitted as the Bible to teach the fine art of dropping healing words upon the world's life. John Bunyan was not a learned man. Nevertheless his little Bible-saturated book has comforted and inspired many generations.

The best English oratory owes a debt to the Bible which every student of such literature is quick to acknowledge. We do not refer now to pulpit address, rather to public speech on other occasions, when the dominion of the Bible over the thought of the speaker

is not a matter of course. It were an easy matter to search through the great English orations of the past for quotations and allusions. They would be found to be very abundant. We recall the impressive passage in Burke's "Address to the King," which Lord Grenville pronounced the best that Burke ever wrote —"What, gracious Sovereign, is the empire of America to us, or the empire of the world, if we lose our own liberties!"—an application evidently of the Lord's words, "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?"[5]

Among American orators we remember Patrick Henry's fervent words in the speech before the Virginia Convention in 1775—"Gentlemen may cry Peace, Peace—but there is no peace"; Thaddeus Stevens' impressive use of the story of the Egyptian bondage in his speech against Webster and northern compromisers;[6] and Samuel Sullivan Cox's sublime peroration on the Sermon on the Mount delivered in the House of Representatives July 3rd, 1879.[7]

Scarcely a day passes in which some speaker does not adorn or fortify his public address with allusions to the Bible. There was a public occasion in an American city some years ago when two Southern orators described the woes of the southland following the

[5] Payne's "Introduction to Burke." Select Works, I, XXXV-XXXVI. The author adds, "In the sections of his works in which this grave simplicity is most prominent, Burke frequently employed the impressive phrases of the Holy Scriptures, affording a signal illustration of the truth that he neglects the most valuable repository of rhetoric in the English language who has not well studied the English Bible."

[6] See *The World's Best Orations,* Vol. IX.

[7] Ibid., Vol. IV.

Civil War. When they had finished, Senator Hoar, who was present, arose and walking across the platform said in substance—"Bitter things have been said and done in the past. I myself have seen bitterness. But now—'thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"[8]

It is a notable fact that when men would speak strongly and fervently, as well as simply, they betake themselves to the diction of the Bible. Even as these words were being penned an orator referring to Belgium's sorrows said, "Belgium's mighty neighbor coveted her vineyard!" And another, describing Belgium's courage, said, "David bravely faced Goliath." Speaking of Germany's broken promises, he added, "She promised bread, she gave a stone." And again, "Belgium has been nailed to the cross for the welfare of civilization. Let us not wait until she cries, 'It is finished.'"

It is not alone by Scriptural quotation and allusion that oratory gains in power. More than all it is the sense of command, and of finality, that the Bible imparts to public speech. Abraham Lincoln's use of the Bible has often been the subject of remark. He used it not merely for ornament and illustration, but mainly for enforcement. When Lincoln referred to the Bible, it seemed like the last word that could be said on any

[8] Chateaubriand makes use of this passage in the Book of Ruth (1:16), in which the Moabitess begs to be permitted to accompany Naomi, as an example of the simple grandeur of the Bible, in contrast with the massed and elaborate grandeur of Homer. "What poetry," says Chateaubriand, "can ever be equivalent to this single stroke of eloquence, 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'" See *Genius of Christianity,* Part II, Book 5, Chaps. 3 and 4.

subject. It gave a sort of fibrous strength to his oratory. The *Gettysburg Speech* is a remarkable example of "the stillness of power," and one reads it with much the same impression that comes with the reading of the Old Testament prophets, notably Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. "The grand colors of Biblical diction" in the *Second Inaugural* give it an impressiveness of an unusual character. In several instances Lincoln rested the weight of his argument upon Biblical sentiment. "With malice towards none, with charity for all"—sounds like an addendum to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. When Lincoln used the very words of Scripture in his famous speech at Springfield in 1858, declaring that "A house divided against itself cannot stand," a profound impression was produced. So also when he referred to slavery in his *Second Inaugural* in this language—"Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come: but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh."

Another remarkable example of the impressive use of the Scripture in public addresses is furnished by President Woodrow Wilson. It is evident to his hearers that his memory has been steeped in the thought and language of the Bible. With him the words of Scripture appear to slip into utterance unbidden. We find him saying, for example, of his political opponents on one occasion—"Their thought is not our thought"—and there is no feeling that this Biblical form has been consciously pressed into service. Rather it is the natural expression of a mind that has lived from childhood in the atmosphere of the Bible. To such an one the Bible is the natural vehicle of human

expression. It has sounded the depths of our life, and its language better than any other is able to catch and hold the overflow of our feelings.

We observe this same tendency of the Scripture to come unbidden into utterance in the conversation of men whose ears have grown accustomed to the sound of it. Newman reminds us that it is an incalculable benefit that the "grave majestic language" of the Bible is heard in constant reiteration in the church, and in the family. It gives tone to the thought of the people and tends constantly to elevate their speech. It is not an uncommon experience with persons who are well-read in the Bible to find themselves, when struggling for the right word or turn of expression, laying hold unconsciously of a phrase or figure of the Scripture. Indeed we have all observed that those whose minds are saturated with the Bible have a habit of reflecting the thought and language of the Bible when they speak or write in such a way as to cause the inquiry, "Was this or that sentence taken from the Bible or from some other book?" This manner of unconscious imitation is a striking testimony to the elemental power of the Scripture.

Many have looked in vain in the Bible for Laurence Sterne's beautiful words—"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." It has a Biblical sound. We are not surprised to find Sterne's biographer saying of him that he read and re-read the Bible during the long winter evenings at Sutton "with the result that his style became saturated with the words and phrases of the English version." Sterne himself describes two kinds of eloquence—one that consists of labored and polished periods and grandly embellished paragraphs,

"a vain and boyish eloquence." "The other sort of eloquence," he adds, "is quite the reverse and may be said to be the true characteristic of Holy Scripture, where the excellence does not arise from a labored and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty, which is a double character so difficult to be united that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human."[9]

It is instructive to observe that editorial writers in newspapers turn frequently and naturally to the Bible to reënforce their argument, to illustrate their lessons, or to adorn their paragraphs. It furnishes them abundant material for happy turns of expression, but more than this, it brings writer and reader to a common ground of understanding. To those who have been fed intellectually and morally on the clearness and force of the Bible, it forms a court of appeal both for reason and emotion. Editorial writers are quick to avail themselves of this popular prerogative of Scripture. In times of great stress and anxiety especially it is common to see writers for the press betaking themselves to the use of Biblical phrases and illustrations. At such times men crave the solidity of the Book, and its sanity of expression. Their minds are somehow comforted and satisfied when they avail themselves of the words of the English Bible. Speaking of the inefficiency of governmental machinery to alleviate popular distress, an editorial writer sums up the situation in such conclusive Biblical language as this—"In their distress they are asking bread of gov-

[9] *Life and Times of Laurence Sterne,* Wilbur L. Cross, Professor of English in Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, p. 479.

ernmental machinery which cannot give them bread—whose normal output under such conditions is only a stone."[10]

To discuss in full the place of the Bible in English prose would lead us far afield. Omitting history, science and philosophy—which, however, have not been untouched by the Bible—we find an indelible stamp of Scripture especially upon essayists, writers of fiction, and other intermediate forms of imaginative lierature in prose. It is difficult to discover any masterful English writer in the last three hundred and fifty years who has not been more or less beholden to the Bible. Izaak Walton, who was really an Elizabethan, who had "the quaint freshness, the apparently artless music of language of the Great Age," whose book, *The Compleat Angler,* "would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it, would Christianize every angry, discordant passion," as Charles Lamb wrote to Coleridge—Izaak Walton opened his treatise on angling with a quotation from the Gospels, and concluded it with the apostle's words to the Thessalonians, "Study to be quiet."[11] The whole book indeed contains that appeal to the "musical sensibility" of the mind which is so marked a characteristic of many prose passages of the Bible.[12]

If we think of the best written prose in English in recent times the names that occur most readily to mind as examples of Biblical influence are the names of Carlyle, Ruskin and Lowell. None have written better English prose than these, and they are all copi-

[10] New York *Tribune,* Feb. 23, 1917.
[11] See *The Compleat Angler.*
[12] See De Mille's *Elements of Rhetoric,* Par. 299.

ous borrowers both of the spirit and language of the Scripture.

Thomas Carlyle as a theologian is very disappointing. It has been said of him that he was "a Calvinist who had lost his creed." Nevertheless he never parts company with the Bible. One can open *The French Revolution* almost at random and find a passage that has a Biblical sound. Charles Kingsley declared that he would be forever indebted to Carlyle's *Revolution* for having learned from it the value of his own life and responsibility for duty. The prophets especially figure in his writings. Something in the stormy spirit of the Scotch cynic allied him with the Old Testament prophets. He is the John the Baptist of English literature, crying in the wilderness, feeding his spirit with locusts and wild honey, and clothing his thought in a rough mantle of camel's hair. One cannot think of his great plainness of speech, his ruggedness, his utter directness, without thinking of Amos and Hosea, and still more of Job. Like the last of these, he is always face to face with the mystery of existence, and he is brave to the end.

In Carlyle more than in any other we are aware of the prophetic quality which the Bible has contributed to English literature. This is a mark of distinction in our literature. We hold that in nothing has the influence of the Bible been more manifest than in that evident desire of English writers to reach out after ideals of beauty, truth, justice, peace, righteousness and usefulness. That sense of moral restraint and longing, and still more that heat of moral passion in the best prose and poetry of our language—where else could these have their source than in the Bible?

It is for this reason, despite his faults, that men class Thomas Carlyle among the prophets of the spiritual life.

John Ruskin is his companion in this, as he is also in the beauty and strength of his English prose. George Eliot once said of Ruskin, "he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet." Ruskin's writings are interwoven throughout with the text of Scripture, and where he does not openly quote or refer to the Bible, the reader feels that it is in the background of his thought. For him it furnishes the richest possible field of imagination and illustration. For him it is fraught with every impulse to thought, every stimulus to endeavor. For him it is atmospheric and color-laden in all those gifts and graces that make up that most real thing in human life—a Christian character.

Opening Ruskin's *St. Mark's Rest* at random, here is an example both of his rich prose and his unmistakable Biblical feeling. He is describing one of the panels of St. Mark's, representing in its sculpture twelve sheep, six on one side, and six on the other, of a throne: on the throne a cross: on the top of the cross a circle: and in the circle a little caprioling creature! Besides there are two palm trees, and two baskets of dates. And here is Ruskin's comment—

"Take your glass and study the carving of this bas-relief intently. It is full of sweet care, subtlety, tenderness of touch, and mind; and fine cadence and change of line in the little bowing heads and bending leaves. Decorative in the extreme: a kind of stone-stitching or sampler-work, done with the innocence of a girl's heart, and in a like unlearned fullness. Here is a Christian man, bringing order and loveliness into the mere furrows of stone. Not by any means as learned as

a butcher, in the joints of lamb: nor as a grocer, in the baskets of dates: nor as a gardener, in indigenous plants: but an artist to the heart's core: and no less true a lover of Christ and his word. Helpless, with his child art, to carve Christ, he carves a cross, and caprioling little thing in a ring at the top of it. You may try—you—to carve Christ, if you can."[13]

Ruskin can scarcely write a page without some image or hint or symbol of the Scripture coming to his mind and springing to the point of his pen. It has been said of him that it is due to him more than to any other man of our race that a multitude of men and women understand to-day the finer meanings of the text, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," for he taught men to look at the sky and the clouds and to distinguish tints and forms. A volume of three hundred pages has been prepared containing passages in Ruskin's writings that are based directly on the Scripture.[14] Thirty-one books of the Old Testament, and twenty-four of the New Testament appear in the index to this volume. When Ruskin himself was asked about the sources of his style, he replied that it came from the Bible and Carlyle. "Once knowing the 32nd of Deuteronomy, the 119th Psalm, the 15th of 1st Corinthians, the Sermon on the Mount, and most of the Apocalypse, every syllable by heart, and having always a way of thinking with myself what words meant, it was not possible for me, even in the foolishest times of youth, to write entirely superficial or formal English."[15] His tribute to the "maternal in-

[13] Chapter IV.

[14] *The Bible References of Ruskin,* by Mary and Ellen Gibbs.

[15] *Praeterita,* Chap. I.

stallation" of his mind in the property of a long list of chapters, which he counted very confidently "the most precious, and, on the whole, the one *essential* part of all his education," is a classic among the testimonies of literary men to the influence of the Bible.

Ruskin has the Old Testament delight in nature, and its feeling of tender mystery and awe, like that of Job and the prophet Amos. Everything that hath been made has for him the sacredness of the Creator's touch. For him the primal law of life is reverence.

Another notable example of Scriptural influence on the best English prose is furnished in the writings of James Russell Lowell. The two volumes of Lowell's letters contain references to twenty-five books of the Bible. In his essay on Spenser, speaking of the vitality of literature, he asks, "Can these dry bones live?" Again, speaking of the "interminable poems" that require so much time for their reading and with slight result, he says, "Consider the life of man, that we flee away as a shadow, that our days are as a post!" Again, he refers to the dawning consciousness of new life in England and "the exhilaration of relief after the long tension of anxiety, when the Spanish Armada was overwhelmed like the hosts of Pharaoh."[16] Lowell's aptness in alluding to the Scripture amounts at times to conclusive argument, as when he criticizes a certain commentator on Milton who has written with his mind so much on circumstances that Milton himself becomes a mere speck on the canvas. "His work reminds us," says this skilful wielder of Scriptural material, "of Allston's picture of Elijah in the wilderness, where a good deal of research at last

[16] *Among My Books*, Vol. II.

enables us to guess at the prophet absconded like a conundrum in the landscape, where the very ravens could scarce have found him out, except by divine commission."[17] This art of apt and conclusive reference to the Scripture is much coveted by English writers, and while with some it is very indelicately used, like "carving statues with hatchets," with others, and these such masters as Lowell, it is used with such delicacy and power as to give a genuine flavor and distinction to what is written.

The place of the Bible in the prose of English fiction is worthy of an extended treatise. If it seem strange to say that the Bible has made a large contribution to fiction, let it be remembered how intensely human it is, and how crowded its pages are with those representative experiences that constitute the very fabric of life. Moreover, there are large portions of the Scripture that are cast in the very forms of literature that are necessary to the writer of fiction. The story element of the Bible is by no means its least attractive material. At length the value of the Biblical stories for educational purposes is receiving recognition, and writers of schoolbooks are now making copious use of Scriptural material.[18]

A long list of Biblical titles of works of fiction could be compiled. Writers seem to feel that if they can select apt Biblical titles, they are certain of popular attention. There is a directness of appeal in such titles that furnishes even commercial value. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is not literally a Biblical title—it

[17] *Among My Books,* Vol. II. "Essay on Milton."

[18] See Young and Fields' *Literary Readers;* also Pearson and Kirchway's *Essentials of English.*

came by way of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* Miss Corelli's *The Master Christian* and *Barabbas* are frankly Scriptural. Sir Walter Besant calls often upon the Bible in naming his books. Witness *Children of Gibeon, The City of Refuge, The Demoniac, The Lament of Dives* and *The Alabaster Box.* Hall Caine also borrows from the Scripture in the *Scapegoat* and *A Son of Hagar.* The usefulness of these titles lies in their suggestiveness—they bring to mind usually whole pages of the Bible, often with accompanying ethical and spiritual lessons. More than one author uses *The Wages of Sin* as a title. Anthony Trollope writes *An Eye for an Eye* and Israel Zangwell writes *The Mantle of Elijah. Bricks Without Straw* and *Figs and Thistles* by Tourgee were favorite books in their day. Single phrases of the Scripture, such as "In the valley of the shadow," "The sword of the Lord," "Whither thou goest," "Thou fool," "A certain rich man," "Prisoners of Hope," "A thief in the night," "The way of a man," "In his steps," "The way of an eagle," and many others have been taken as book titles.

Professor Cook makes the interesting statement that in three books which he read for entertainment he found many Scriptural quotations and allusions. One, a book on life in an Italian province, contained sixty-three references: another, a work on the life of wild animals, contained twelve: and a third, a novel by Thomas Hardy, contained eighteen.[19] Anyone who reads attentively will have a similar experience. Novelists are by no means the least of those who are

[19] *The Authorized Version of the Bible and its Influence,* Albert S. Cook, p. 70.

beholden to the Bible. The truth is that men who are deeply in earnest in writing about life find it very difficult to dispense with Scriptural language and imagery. When Mr. Britling went to his study and stared helplessly at maps, it seemed to him that it was as if David had flung his pebble—and missed! It seemed to him too that England was sending her children through the fires to Moloch. Again—"the sort of thing that is done over here in the green army will be done over there in the dry."[20]

Writers now and then show extraordinary skill in adapting the incidents of Scripture to their needs even if they must presume too much upon the knowledge of the average reader. Thus in *The Inner Shrine* one writes in a letter, "There will arrive in your city by the steamer Picardie, on the twenty-eighth day of this month, two foolish women answering to the name of Eveleth—mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, both widows—and presenting the sorry spectacle of Naomi and Ruth returning to the land of Promise after a ruinous sojourn in a foreign country." The whole of the Biblical story is suggested here, but does the reader know it well enough to understand? Evidently the author fears not, for he makes one who listened to the letter inquire immediately, "Is there a Bible in the house, mother?"

The wealth of dramatic incident in the Bible furnishes much material ready to hand for the writer of fiction. The Bible is rich in the literature of action. A single phrase or sentence will often serve as a text for a story, as where it is said of the prodigal son that "he came to himself," or where it is stated of Lot's

[20] *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, H. G. Wells.

wife that she "looked back," or where it is affirmed of a sinful life that "the wages of sin is death," or where the law of harvest in life is given, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Many works of fiction have been written with one or other of these Scriptural thoughts as the *motif*. Scripture narrative too contributes a great deal of material to story-writers, both as to theme and form. There are scores of scenes in the Bible that live irresistibly in memory and repeat themselves unconsciously in literature. "The days of creation; the narratives of Joseph and his brethren, of Ruth, of the final defeat of Ahab, of the discomfiture of the Assyrian host of Sennacharib; the moral discourses of Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus and the Book of Wisdom; the poems of the Psalms and the Prophets; the visions of the Revelation—a hundred other passages which it is unnecessary to catalogue—will always be the *ne plus ultra* of English composition in their several kinds, and the storehouse from which generation after generation of writers, sometimes actually hostile to religion and often indifferent to it, will draw materials, and not infrequently the actual form, of their most impassioned and elaborate passages."[21]

It is in theme and plot that writers of fiction are most of all indebted to the Bible. Being, as it is, a vast library of human experience, the Bible is closely related to life at many important points. Its major scenes and incidents, its plots and situations, its whole force of dramatic action, are at the command of those who seek to depict life, whether in the form of ro-

[21] *History of Elizabethan Literature,* Saintsbury, Chap. 6.

mance or tragedy. Hall Caine the novelist gives his testimony on this point. "I think that I know my Bible as few literary men know it. There is no book in the world like it, and the finest novels ever written fall far short in interest of any one of the stories it tells. Whatever strong situations I have in my books are not my creation, but are taken from the Bible. *The Deemster* is a story of the Prodigal Son. *The Bondman* is the story of Esau and Jacob. *The Scapegoat* is the story of Eli and his sons, but with Samuel as a little girl; and *The Manxman* is the story of David and Uriah."

It is the story-teller, as much as the preacher, who discovers in modern life the "human analogue" to the persons and incidents of the Bible. Certain great books like *The Scarlet Letter* have done more than many sermons to carry the teachings of the Bible over into the arena of life.[22] George Eliot was but a scant believer, yet her three masterpieces, *Silas Marner, Adam Bede,* and *Romola,* contain powerful briefs for Christianity and are distinctly Biblical in theme and tone.

In the matter of plot invention it may be truly said that there is nothing new under the sun. From time immemorial story-tellers have been compelled to confine themselves to a relatively small number of plots. Their art consists, so far as variety is concerned, in putting new faces on old figures. Almost without exception the major plots used by story-tellers are represented prominently in the Bible by familiar stories and situations.

[22] See the present author's volume, *The Fascination of the Book,* p. 172.

The story of Joseph in the Old Testament and of Onesimus in the New Testament are impressive and beautiful examples of the "Divinity that shapes our ends": while Jesus' ever-memorable Parable of the Prodigal Son has influenced generations of story-writers who have dealt with the waste of life and its ultimate restoration. The scene between King David and the prophet Nathan, with its startling dénouement, "Thou art the man," is a powerful example of an oft-recurrent plot, where the story turns upon the length to which personal sin may carry an otherwise good man, until some great exposure reveals the sinner to himself as well as to the world. Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* is the strongest modern example of this plot.

Another familiar plot much used in literature is that wherein quantity and quality contend with one another, where there is a matching of unequal forces, the weak against the strong, meagre weapons against heavy arms, with the victory turning at length to the weak. Literature has made heavy demands upon this plot, but where has it ever been used with such effectiveness as in the story of David and Goliath, and the story of Gideon's army? Or take the story of Ruth—how this beautiful little idyl has gone forth into literature! The plot here turns upon three points, first the sorrow and solitude of life, next the reward of virtue and the crowning of simple trust, third, the Providence that watches over the affairs of human hearts. Scores of books have been written with this same *motif,* presenting a background of homely surroundings, with love's masterful independence of life's station. Other narratives of the Old Testament furnish suggestive material for romance, for example, the

story of Isaac and Rebecca, and the interesting account of Jacob's long devotion to Rachel—a devotion that outlasted death, as the patriarch's charge to Joseph proves. If it be the romance of childhood that is asked for, the plot that thickened about the life of the child Moses, and the wonderful way in which he was led out and up into life, has long been a model for story-tellers.

The story of Esther has been reproduced times without number in literature. Every element of tragic plot is here, difficulty, misunderstanding, entanglement, ambition, intrigue—then the dénouement in the King's sleepless night and his discovery of Mordecai's faithfulness. The *motif* throughout is to show that while good may suffer temporary eclipse, it will come forth triumphant. God is within the shadow "keeping watch above His own."

The sorrowful story of Judas Iscariot's tragic fall from a great opportunity has written itself very deeply into literature. George Eliot's *Romola* came forth from the Gospel pages where the story of Judas is written. The story centers in Tito, brilliant, charming, but false—a man who, despite his talents and his opportunities, turned more and more to the weak and beggarly elements of life, until moral degradation resulted. Tito is an example, as Judas is, of "that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character."

It is probable that the melancholy story of Judas, the conflict between good and evil, the fatality of indulgence, the gradual deterioration in moral tone, gave to Robert Louis Stevenson his cue for *Dr. Jekyl and*

Mr. Hyde. Men must give good the upper hand, they must allow no weakening of their moral fibre by indulgence, they must win daily victories by choice—victories which ultimately establish the character in righteousness. English writers, and most of all, writers of fiction, have told this story over and over again.

The so-called problem stories of English fiction are, many of them, deeply imbedded in the Bible. If the writers of these stories fail at times to find the door of hope that opens out of the problems of life—like poor Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*—it is because they do not read far enough into the words which as Jesus said are spirit and life. The trouble with George Eliot was that she had never discovered the cross. She could paint the reality of sin, but she did not know the remedy. She could picture one of her characters rushing through the wood "to put a wide space between him and his sin," but she could not tell about the arms of the Savior that were open to receive the sinner. So also with *The Scarlet Letter.* Dimmesdale is driven by the sharp pain of the symbol on his breast to make confession, but Hawthorne's only refuge from the dilemma was death. Nevertheless such strange failures to follow the Scripture to the end are not wholly unfortunate. They spur the world's heart to the venture of faith. Such a story as Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter,* for example, has given an emphasis to the spiritual teaching about the wages of sin, the inevitable harvest of evil-sowing, the certain exposure of wrong-doing, and the need of inward cleansing through the blood of redemption, such as the world can never forget.

XVII

THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH POETRY

"Look forth!—that Stream behold,
That Stream upon whose bosom we have passed."
Wordsworth.

IN the case of English poetry the stream of Biblical influence has flowed deep and strong. Our poetry indeed is the most Christian part of our English literature, and is more deeply impregnated than any other with the spiritual messages of the Word of God. The poet of all writers has caught the soul refrain of the Bible most clearly, and has echoed its music most impressively in the ears of the world.

There are two obvious reasons why our poets incline with such evident sympathy to the Scripture. The Bible is itself in many parts poetical, while much of its prose is imbued with the spirit of poetry. This in itself constitutes a strong appeal to every poet's heart. It is not surprising then that our English poets early and late have discovered in the Bible a kinship of feeling and expression that has won for it their sincere appreciation. From the early English scop, the minstrel and story-teller, English poets have loved to adorn their lines with Biblical illustrations, incidents, types and formulæ of expression.

It is, however, when we remember the peculiar character of Biblical poetry that we begin to appreci-

ate the full force of the individual appeal of the Scripture to the poet. Biblical poetry is of the profoundest kind—the kind that moves most powerfully upon the soul. There is nothing merely casual or incidental in the poetry of the Bible. It may have its local color and its concrete objectivity; nevertheless its true object is ever in the region of the soul's life and feeling. Watts-Dunton calls Hebrew poetry the "Great Lyric." "There is nothing in Pindar, or indeed elsewhere in Greek poetry, like the rapturous song, combining unconscious power with unconscious grace, which we have called the Great Lyric." In the nature of the case it has been quite impossible for English poets to remain indifferent to the majestic appeal of the lyric and epic poetry of the Hebrew.

The poet's own susceptibility of course is the companion factor that establishes for him an intimate relationship with the Bible. By this we mean not alone his musical sensibility, but much more—we mean the total instinct of his mind for all that is truly imaginative and spiritual in the deepest way. The very mystery and idealism of the Bible, its imagery, its optimism, its romance, its constant lift of thought upwards to the skies—all this constitutes the natural pabulum of the poet's mind.[1] The poet is by constitution spiritually-minded. His thoughts cling to the moral frame of things. He is perforce a man of vision, and his soul is always listening for some true voice. Shelley declared that "prophecy is an attribute of poetry." "Every writer is an evangelist of some sort." We do not expect to find theology as an articu-

[1] See *Vocal and Literary Interpretation of the Bible,* Prof. S. S. Curry. Chapter IX on "The Lyric Spirit."

lated system in poetry—the poets are interpreters rather than theologians. They must not be required to be orthodox like the theologians; yet often we are aware that they follow an unerring instinct. For the most part our poets have taken their philosophy of life from the Scripture. English poetry is profoundly Christian; its spirit is steeped in the Bible. There is no major teaching of the Bible that has not been carried over in scores of ways into English poetry. Thus it has come to pass that our poets are often true leaders in the spirit, and teachers of what is found in the life of the spirit.

No censorship that men could devise would be minute enough to take the Bible out of English poetry. Its thought and language are woven into the very texture of our poetic literature. It is rare indeed to find a poet of English name who is careless of "the magic and haunting charm" of the Bible. To the poet the language of the Bible lives in the heart like music that never dies away: its pictures fill his mind: its far cry of the soul sounds far within him. There are certain major poems of our language, like Browning's "Saul" and Tennyson's "In Memoriam," that stand as monuments to the towering strength of the Bible in constructive minds. Such poems could never have been written without the impulse supplied by the Bible —more than this, without the literary material furnished by it. These are examples only of scores of English poems that flow in the sweet cadence of the Word of God.

The manner of the poets in the use of the Bible is marked by great variety. Often it is a mere reference, as when Browning writes—

"the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize."

Whittier's familiar lines furnish a beautiful example of Biblical reference—

"The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again."

Yet the poet cannot make even a slight reference to the Bible without giving it his own interpretative touch. The remotest incident of Scripture he may clothe with garments of his own and breathe into it the breath of life. We see again the figure of the Canaanitish captain Sisera in his unequal contest with the stars, in Thomas Hardy's lines about Napoleon—

"I have been subdued,
But by the elements and them alone.
Not Russia, but God's sky has conquered me."

Isaiah takes up his parable against the King of Babylon (Chapter 14) saying—"Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?" And Byron takes up the same parable against Napoleon—

"Is this the man of thousand thrones,
Who strewed the earth with hostile bones?"[2]

There is scarcely a poet worth knowing in all the English galaxy whose poems are not interlarded thus with Biblical references. Tennyson has hundreds of references. Wordsworth, the Brownings, Matthew Arnold, Kipling and many others have turned often

[2] "Ode to Napoleon."

to the Scripture for illustration. As Mr. Chapman has said, "Practically all great poetry deals with religion."[3] It matters not whether the poet be in the fullest sense a believer or not—he cannot divest himself of religious questions. Nor can he write long without drawing water from the deepest well of religion ever opened to men—the Holy Bible. The very language of the Scripture indeed often flows unconsciously from his pen, for he more than other men recognizes in it the language of sincerity and power.

An excellent example of this natural use of Scripture is seen in Matthew Arnold, whose mind turns easily to Scriptural forms. In "Rugby Chapel," he writes,

> "Servants of God—or sons
> Shall I not call you? because
> Not as servants ye knew
> Your Father's innermost mind,
> His, who unwilling sees
> One of his little ones lost."

There is no apparent effort of the poet thus in referring twice in these few lines to the Bible.

The indebtedness of the poets to the Bible is far deeper than that of mere reference and allusion. Not infrequently, like writers of fiction, they turn to the Bible for their themes, as well as for something at least of their dramatic action. Here as always they must be free to exercise their poetic license, and therefore they will not be bound by detail. Nevertheless they are often glad to accept from the Scripture their main thought, or incident: nor are they always careful to conceal the source of their material. Thus Tenny-

[3] *English Literature in Account with Religion*, p. 464.

son tells the story of an almost forgotten Old Testament mother in his "Rizpah";[4] Milton, as we have seen, enshrines a Biblical story in his "Samson Agonistes"; and Browning does not hesitate to make use of Bible characters and incidents in a number of his poems, such as "Saul," "An Epistle," "A Death in the Desert." In the case of Browning the Scripture apparently suggests to him at times a point of view. Hence his use of "Bells and Pomegranates," and "Pisgah-Lights" as titles.

More than all, however, it is just the innate spirituality of the poets that takes them so often to the Bible. They are for the most part reverent men, and like Moses in the mount, they turn aside to see the bush that burns with fire—and often they find it "aflame with God." They are irresistibly concerned with the problems of the soul and of destiny; hence they are compelled to feed upon the Word of God, whether they be orthodox or otherwise. In the remaining chapters of this volume we shall refer to the presence of Biblical doctrine and Biblical idealism in English literature. Here indeed lie the deepest roots of our best English poetry. It is in reality Biblical teaching, with the high optimism and vision of the Bible, it is this most of all that represents the truest debt of the poets to the Holy Scripture, and makes them in a real way teachers "of those who would live in the spirit."

Out of the great number of poets who have drawn copious supplies from the Bible, Browning and Tennyson deserve special attention, together with Longfellow and Whittier.

A volume of considerable size has been written on

[4] II Samuel 21.

The Bible in Browning.[5] A dozen pages of the appendix are required merely to list the Biblical quotations and allusions in "The Ring and the Book." The author holds that no modern poet has shown such intimate acquaintance with the Bible. "His writings are thoroughly interpenetrated by its spirit, and in many of his poems a Scriptural quotation or allusion may be found on almost every page." Browning is peculiar in his tendency to cling often to certain Scriptural phrases which appeal to his musical sensibility. Thus Hezekiah's words of reverence—"I will go softly all my years"—are quoted four times in "The Ring and the Book," once in this modified form—

> "And he'll go duly docile all his days."

Frequently Browning crowds his lines with Scriptural thought as in this passage from "By the Fireside"—

> "Think, when our one soul understands
> The great Word which makes all things new,
> When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
> How will the change strike me and you,
> In the house not made with hands?"

At times he does not hesitate to paraphrase the Scripture, proving how adaptable even the prose of the Bible is to the uses of the poet. Read, for example, Exodus 24: 9-11, and then read Browning in "One Word More"—

> "Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
> Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
> Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
> Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,

[5] By Minnie Gresham Machen.

Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!"

The poet might almost be accused of Biblical plagiarism!

Browning is quite as apt as any other poet in turning remote Biblical incidents to his use, as in this—

"no Rahab-thread,
For blushing token of the spy's success."

But he delights especially in his lines to linger with Scriptural thought, and to draw out at some length his use of the sacred language, as in this—

"When He who trod,
Very man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, Lord of Lords,
As his servant John received the words,
'I died and live forevermore!'"

"The Ring and the Book," with its more than five hundred distinct allusions, is probably the most Biblical poem in our language. Twenty-eight books of the Old Testament and twenty-five of the New Testament contribute to it. One who does not know his Bible must flounder in distress in reading this famous poem. It is almost an exercise in Bible study. What, for instance, can one do with lines such as these unless he knows well his Old Testament narrative?

"And he went up
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
And the eyes opened."

Here the poet has missed no detail of the Biblical account except that "the child sneezed seven times." There are many slight references which the poet makes in passing which must prove very trying to one unfamiliar with Biblical incident, as in this instance—

"So a fool
Once touched the ark—poor Uzzah that I am!"

Browning's Christological poems are referred to later in this chapter, and his use of Biblical doctrine is mentioned in the succeeding chapter. No English poet has drunk more deeply at the fountain of the Word, and none has profited more by what he has obtained there. If it be true that God "has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear," Browning is certainly one of the few, and his being so is due in part to the fact that he held always deep conversance with the Word of God. It does not much concern us to know what was his individual creed—there is one thing to which his poems bear enduring witness, the permanent and inexpressible value of the Bible to the souls of men. No man of Browning's depth of reason and culture could have allowed himself to lean so heavily upon the Bible if he had not believed in its mission and message. To him it was the Book of Life, and knowing it as he did, he could not do otherwise than write its

lessons out for men in scores and hundreds of his lines. He has in truth so interwoven the thought and language of Scripture in his poems, that much of it could be recovered from his pages if the original were lost.

Tennyson is only second to Browning in his use of the Bible. Dr. van Dyke's estimate of four hundred or more Biblical allusions in Tennyson is far too low. He is less given than Browning to quotation and paraphrase: nevertheless he is quite as much in the atmosphere of the Book. Some of his poems are profoundly Biblical in their tone. This is especially true of "In Memoriam" and the "Idylls." He is here moving on Biblical ground, and dealing with Biblical themes. Tennyson is acutely sensitive to the charm and cadence of the Scripture, and we can often detect its music in his lines. In him too we find, as in Browning, the expression in poetic form of our great human experiences, our spiritual fears and problems, together with the affirmation of Christian thinking upon subjects of the soul's life and destiny. As we shall see later, he deals constantly with such subjects as faith, immortality, prayer and sin.

Tennyson turned to the Bible naturally: he felt the spell of its poetry. But more than this, he felt the reality of its touch upon life and its problems, and therefore he did not fear to carry over into his poems the ideals of the Bible. Not a few of his poems thus have their origin directly in the Bible. As Mr. Chapman tells us—" 'The Two Voices' and 'St. Simeon Stylites' are admirable paraphrases in modern language of the old cry of St. Paul conscious of the war in his members. 'The Vision of Sin' is a replica of

the Scriptural 'mystery of iniquity.' 'Aylmer's Field,' 'Locksley Hall,' and 'Maud' all remind us of the miserable and often suicidal fraud perpetrated by him who would appraise his own life or that of another in terms of material possessions."[6]

He is not less apt than Browning at times in weaving together several Scriptural allusions in a few lines. A good example of this is found in Enoch Arden's words to his wife—

> "Cast all your cares on God: that anchor holds.
> Is He not yonder in the uttermost
> Parts of the morning? If I flee to these
> Can I go from Him? And the sea is His,
> The sea is His: He made it."

At other times a single line of Biblical allusion is so skilfully used as to speak volumes, as in "Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After"—

> "Follow Light and do the Right—for man can half control his doom—
> Till you see the deathless angel seated in the vacant tomb."

It is unnecessary for the poet to affirm in terms of a creed his belief in resurrection: this one line says all that he needs to say.

Many Bible characters reappear in Tennyson's poems, from Adam and Eve to Mary and Lazarus. The story of Jephthah's daughter is repeated in "The Dream of Fair Women," while in "Rizpah" the story of the Hebrew mother who watched over the bodies of her slain sons is changed to the story of an English mother whose son was executed for robbery. Many other familiar Bible personages and scenes—the Queen

[6] *English Literature in Account with Religion*, pp. 373, 374.

of Sheba, Vashti, Miriam, Jael, Lot's wife, Jonah's gourd, the Tower of Babel—return to us in Tennyson's poems.[7]

Dr. van Dyke quotes the opinion of Professor Plumptre who holds that "the most suggestive of all commentaries" on *Ecclesiastes,* the book which has proved disconcerting to not a few Bible readers, is found in Tennyson's poems, "The Vision of Sin," "The Palace of Art" and "The Two Voices." The opening lines of the last-named poem—

> "A still small voice spake unto me,
> Thou art so full of misery,
> Were it not better not to be,"—

are the echo of "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity." The warfare in the members is stated in these words—

> "He knows a baseness in his blood
> At such strange war with something good,
> He may not do the thing he would."

The last line is only a variation of the apostle Paul—"For what I would, that do I not" (Romans 7: 15). To this soul torn by despair relief comes with the open window on the Sabbath morn, when—

> "The sweet church bells began to peal."

[7] *The Poetry of Tennyson,* by Henry van Dyke. Chapter on "The Bible in Tennyson." In the opinion of Dr. van Dyke the most beautiful of all Tennyson's New Testament references is his description in "In Memoriam" of the reunion between Mary and Lazarus—

> "When Lazarus left his charnel-cave
> And home to Mary's house return'd,
> Was this demanded,—if he yearn'd
> To hear her weeping by his grave?"

Then—

"My frozen heart began to beat
Remembering its ancient heat."

And—

"The dull and bitter voice was gone."

Then another voice speaks, "Rejoice, rejoice!" To many a "frozen heart" Tennyson's Scriptural message about the "hidden hope," and the power that breaks "like the rainbow from the shower," has brought sweet comfort in time of stress. A very happy use is made in "The Two Voices" of the patience of Stephen in his persecution—

"He heeded not reviling tones,
Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
Tho' cursed and scorn'd, and bruised with stones.
* * * * *
But looking upward, full of grace,
He pray'd, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face."

"The Palace of Art" is Tennyson's version of the Lord's parable of the man who said to his soul, "Take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry," of whom at length God required the surrender of his soul—

"I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell.
I said, O soul, make merry and carouse,
Dear soul, for all is well."

The God-like isolation seemed perfect gain, but even here "the riddle of the painful earth" pressed in, and the soul could not be rid of an inward distress—

"The airy hand confusion wrought,
Wrote 'Mene, mene,' and divided quite
The Kingdom of her thought."

It is only when—

> "Far off she seem'd to hear the dully sound
> Of human footsteps fall"—

that the soul begins to rouse herself to saner thought, and at length, after throwing her royal robes away—

> " 'Make me a cottage in the vale,' she said,
> 'Where I may mourn and pray.' "

The teaching of "The Palace of Art" is that earth cannot contribute ultimate peace to the soul—it is the gift of God. However magnificent one's isolation from the world in ease and splendor, there can be no purging of guilt apart from God, and no escape from that call to the soul which is sure to come—"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" One may write the conclusion of the Lord's parable as a comment at the close of "The Palace of Art"—"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12: 21.)

Mr. Chapman suggests that Tennyson's poem, "Aylmer's Field," would "admirably serve the purpose of a college examination in ability to recognize and verify allusions to Scripture." "The poem is so compact of Biblical reference, phrase, and feeling as to make illustration difficult except one quote the whole."[8] We very much fear indeed that the average junior or senior would have difficulty in identifying the many allusions of this Scriptural poem.

No poet is more apt than Tennyson in adapting phrases, even simple words, of Scripture to poetic

[8] *English Literature in Account with Religion*, p. 367.

uses. He speaks of "Goliathizing" and "Molochizing," of the "left-hand thief," of "a whole Peter's sheet," of "grapes of Eshcol hugeness," of "a Jacob's ladder," of "Peter's rock," of "Arimathean Joseph," of "power of the keys." How much is said in the lines—

"Persecute the Lord
And play the Saul that never will be Paul."

And in these from "Harold"—

"Mock-King, I am the messenger of God,
His Norman Daniel! Mene, Mene, Tekel."

And in these from "Queen Mary"—

"Remember how God made the fierce fire seem
To those three children like a pleasant dew."

And in these also—

"Since your Herod's death
How oft hath Peter knocked at Mary's gate."

And in these from "The Holy Grail"—

"Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,
Cried, 'If I lose myself, I save myself.'"

And in these supremely beautiful lines from "In Memoriam"—

" O living will that shalt endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock,
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow through our deeds and make them pure."

In examples such as these we see how susceptible is a poet's heart to the lightest touch of Holy Scripture. We observe also how rich and fine is his gift to men of that sweetness of the Word that is "sweeter also than honey and the droppings of the honey-comb."

American poets, like their brethren across the sea, are indebted to the Bible for inspiration in their art. The deepest, truest strain in American poetry is traceable in a direct line to Biblical influence. The "perpetual conversance with deep things and with the Bible" which Matthew Arnold attributes to the Puritans, was the early characteristic of New England life. Charles Dudley Warner has drawn for us a picture of the early life of New England;—"When I consider the narrow limitations of the Pilgrim households, the absence of luxury, the presence of danger and hardship, the harsh laws—only less severe than the contemporary laws of England and Virginia—the weary drudgery, the few pleasures, the curb upon the expression of emotion and of tenderness, the ascetic repression of worldly thought, the absence of poetry in the routine occupations and conditions, I can feel what the Bible must have been to them. It was an open door into a world where emotion is expressed, where imagination can range, where love and longing find a language, where imagery is given to every noble and suppressed passion of the soul, where every aspiration finds wings. It was history, or as Thucydides said, philosophy, teaching by example; it was the romance of real life; it was entertainment unfailing; the wonder-book of childhood, the volume of sweet sentiment to the shy maiden, the sword to the soldier, the inciter of the youth to heroic enduring of hardness; it was the refuge of the aged in failing activity."[9] Out of such a soil sown deep with spiritual seed sprang the flower of New England poetry.

It must suffice to refer in particular to Whittier and

[9] *The Relation of Literature to Life*, pp. 35, 36.

Longfellow. One who will take pains to examine Whittier's poems, looking for traces of Biblical influence, will find it necessary to leave pencil-marks upon many lines and paragraphs. "The Bible," says Stedman, "was rarely absent from his verse, and its spirit never." He held that all the sages said—

"Is in the Book our mothers read."

"Our Master" is almost a replica of Scripture. It may be studied in several points of view:—

First, for its suggestive use of Biblical incident, as in the lines—

"Who know with John his smile of love,
With Peter his rebuke."

Second, for its interpretation of Biblical fact into life and faith, as in this instance—

"And faith has still its Olivet
And love its Galilee."

Third, for its adaptation of Christian doctrine, as here—

"Deep strike thy roots, O heavenly Vine."

Fourth, for its recognition of the present Christ, as in the well-loved lines—

"We may not climb the heavenly steeps,
To bring the Lord Christ down."

Fifth, for its lofty Christian aspiration, as in this—

"To thee our full humanity,
Its joys and pains belong."

In such a poem as this it is not alone the skilful use of the language of Scripture that strikes the

reader—it is the rhythm of Scriptural thought and feeling that runs like an undercurrent of music throughout the poem. It is this that constitutes its real life and character as a poem.

Whittier, like many other poets, loves to test our knowledge of incidental things in the Bible—thus:—

> "The eye may well be glad that looks
> Where Pharpar's fountains rise and fall,
> But he who sees his native brooks
> Laugh in the sun has seen them all."

The poems of Longfellow may well be studied for their Scriptural allusions. We can refer here only to "Evangeline" and to one particular feature of the poet's use of the Bible, his skilful Scriptural similes. The change of seasons is described, when—

"Wrestled the trees of the forest, as Jacob of old with the angel."

Evangeline saw the moon pass forth from the folds of a cloud with a star following—

"As out of Abraham's tent young Ishmael wandered with Hagar."

In their devotions the souls of the people of Grand-Pré—

"Rose on the ardor of prayer, like Elijah ascending to heaven."

The setting of the sun reminds the poet of Moses coming down from the mountain—

"Down sank the great red sun, and in golden, glimmering vapors
Veiled the light of his face, like the prophet descending from Sinai."

We have now to take note of an outstanding feature of English poetry in its relation to the Bible, and this is its recognition of the presence of Christ. The Christology of our English poets is a stupendous argument, both for the vitality of the Book, and for the verity of the Christ. If one were to set himself the task of following the footsteps of the poets in their teachings about Christ, he would find much that could with difficulty be compressed within the compass of the creeds. Nevertheless he would discover that the poets seldom lose sight of the Great Figure in the way. The poets are not often doubters of the essential truth of Christ and Christianity, and often their interpretation of Scripture is like the breaking out of light or the sudden opening of doors. The moral dynamic of Jesus appeals to them: His lofty idealism convinces them. They recognize in Jesus the profound and uncomprehended answer to many things of which they have dreamed in their own spirits. There are indeed poets "whose reed has a short gamut, and plays but two notes, Mars and Eros, hopeless death and lawless love." But these are exceptions to the rule. The prevailing mood with the poets is that of spiritual wonder, and imagination—the wonder and imagination that are akin to faith. Their faith is large and reverent—it is gifted with the power of flight. To the poet the distance is not far to God—He is near, very near—

"Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

There is a remarkable passage in the prose writings of the southern poet Sidney Lanier which well expresses the poet's sense of God's nearness—

"I fled in tears from the men's ungodly quarrel about God. I fled in tears to the woods, and laid me down on the earth. Then somewhat like the beating of many hearts came up to me out of the ground; and I looked and my cheek lay close to a violet. Then my heart took courage and I said,—'I know that thou art the word of my God, dear violet; and oh, the ladder is not long that to my heaven leads. Measure what space a violet stands above the ground: 'tis no further climbing that my soul and angels have to do than that.' "[10] We are not surprised to find him saying in "The Marshes of Glynn"—

"And belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know."

It is this rare Christian poet who voices his "reverent discipleship of the Great Artist and Master" in that most perfect of all tributes in English poetry to the triumphant surrender of the Son of Man, called "A Ballad of Trees and the Master"—

"Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame."

"The Crystal" of whom Lanier writes in another deeply Christian poem is Christ—

"Jesus, good Paragon, thou Crystal Christ."

It is not so much the historic Christ whom the poets love to picture as it is the living, present Christ

[10] *Poems of Sidney Lanier.* Edited by his wife. The passage quoted is from the memorial introduction by William Hayes Ward, p. XXXIX.

of today. Many an English poet has sung over again the message of *Piers Plowman*—

> "Jesus Christ of Heaven
> In a poor man's apparell pursueth us ever."

We must turn again to Browning and Tennyson to find the completest and most satisfying recognition of Christ. Browning's "Christmas Eve" contains a transcendent vision of the Son of Man—a vision which the poet saw, not in the chapel, but out on the hillside in the darkness of night—

> "All at once I looked up with terror. He was there,
> He Himself with his human air."

Volumes of argument and controversy on the subject of the true humanity and true divinity of Christ are replaced by these lines. The poet has no difficulty with this problem. It seems to him a thing most gloriously true—a thing too real and too personal to be altogether mysterious—that Christ should come "with his human air" among men, to live and walk and work among them, and to bring them to God. Or what can exceed the spiritual effect of the scene in "Saul" where the poet teaches the presence of Christ in all His silent friendliness and beauty? David the shepherd has played various shepherd tunes before the weary and distracted king, the water rustling in the brook, the wind playing in the trees, the sheep browsing on the hills. Then the harp takes up a march, "wherein man runs to man to assist him"—

> "Here in the darkness Saul groaned."

A score of sermons are in this line. Then the poet proclaims the Gospel of the present Christ—

"O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See The Christ stand!"

It is a wonderful apologetic, a profoundly satisfying Christology.

Read Browning's "Abt Vogler," a poem dedicated to the power of music, or, to put it in other words, a poem dedicated to those who do not reason their way into reality, but who feel the truth that is close to them in God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. Not a few indeed are Christians in this manner of being so—they *know* whom they have believed, know Him in ways that no polemic of doubt can overturn—

"Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the Ineffable Name?
Builder and Maker Thou of houses not made with hands!
* * * * *
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear,
The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know."[11]

Tennyson's "In Memoriam" deserves a volume. It is the English classic not only on Immortality, but on Christ—

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove."

[11] Mrs. Browning too is worthy to be studied for her recognition of the Bible and Christ. See Martha Foote Crow's volume, *Modern Poets and Christian Teaching.* Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Chapter IV, "The Christ."

This noble Christian poem breathes throughout a spirit of utmost reverence and wonder toward the living, reigning, triumphant Christ of faith.

There is a vitality about the name of Christ that makes it live especially in the hearts of poets. When they would utter their best thoughts, somehow they must link themselves to the name of Jesus. When they would deal with the deep longings of human hearts, somehow these longings find utterance in the language of Jesus. When they would study the dark problems of human life, somehow they must listen at last to some simple word of the Master. It is in reality the spirit of Christ inbreathed that has given to English literature its greatest mark of distinction, its tone of uplift, of spirituality, and of power. Our English poets are irresistibly Christian—they cannot keep from speaking the name of Christ.

XVIII

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE IN LITERATURE

"I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts."—Wordsworth.

IT is no doubt often true, as Principal Shairp says, that "Goethe, the high-priest of culture, loathes Luther, the preacher of righteousness." It would be a futile task to go among the writers and try to prove that they have prevailingly adopted a Biblical point of view. The contrary would many times be found to be the case. A large literature of doubt has accumulated in the past, and it is still receiving accessions. Speaking one day to Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle sneered at the doctrine of the future life as "old Jewish rags." But he did not find a sympathetic auditor in the author of "In Memoriam." We cannot console ourselves with the easy belief that most of our men of light and leading have been frankly Christian in their attitude. Some have seemed to eschew the subject of religion altogether, whilst others seem to have entered early into "the years that bring the philosophic mind," and thus to have built about them a wall of intellectual defense, from behind which they attack and defend quite merrily.

For the most part, however, our English writers are constantly aware of the religious question. Even

when they try, they do not succeed in divesting themselves wholly of the subject. It returns again and again. There is ever a haunting echo of something that will not cease, a reminder of a power that will not abdicate. Shelley wrote himself down gaily as "P. B. Shelley, atheist"; yet Robert Browning held that if Shelley had lived he would have become a Christian believer. The Christian poet detected beneath the unbelief of the other the lurking signs of belief. There were great truths that kept asserting themselves beneath his negations: there were smouldering fires of feeling that threatend to burst forth behind the coldness of his intellectualism. This phenomenon of irresistible believing is quite familiar in the literary world. Our writers are often more Christian than they would have us suppose. Their independence, their mood of protest, their spirit of quest and adventure, the daring of their imagination, the wide sweep of their vision—such influences that are native to them and that constitute the very atmosphere of their life and work, may seem to carry them far away from the moorings of faith. Yet how often we observe that their hearts draw them back—back to the simplicities of faith. Their own gifts and capacities clamor for something more than negation. The poet's imagination must have something to feed upon: it cannot wander forever over the waste finding no rest for the sole of its foot: it must at least find some olive branch and pluck it.

It is thus true—we believe it cannot be disproved—that our writers in general have at least tendencies to belief, even where their intellectual formulæ have a contrary appearance. Literature in the last analysis

cannot remain cold. It warms itself at the fires of life. It cannot exist apart from the wells of emotion. Its interests are closely akin to the interests of religion. They are not two separate spheres, that merely impinge one upon the other—they are rather interlocking spheres. Much that transpires in one is duplicated in the other. We have seen how writers of fiction are bound to turn to religion. It is too large a concern to be ignored. Fiction writers are wiser than some philosophers—they do not undertake to bow religion out of the world of human experience.

But while this close relation between literature and religion is to be insisted upon, it must also be freely admitted that the two are not equivalent. They do not undertake the same task, they do not deal with the same material. Their method, too, is different. Literature suffers less restraint—it is more flexible and adaptable. No one thinks of making the same demands upon the poet that are made upon the theologian. If the poet were in all respects a theologian, he would not be a poet. He must have freedom to move in his own track. He may greatly assist the cause of religion, but he must do it in his own way. If you try to bind him hand and foot in theological fetters, his music will fall into silence. But let him sing his own song, at his own time and in his own way, and you shall scarcely fail to hear some notes that will cheer your soul with familiar and well-beloved truth. This independence of the writer is to be constantly remembered, else we shall not rightly assess the spiritual value of his work. We must not insist too strongly upon the theological pattern for the writer. The poet, for instance, is still the *maker*, the *creator*, and he

must be permitted to ply his art as his soul is moved. You must not expect him to carry over the Biblical doctrines in bodily form into his work—it is enough if you hear the refrain of them. You may have to content yourself with seeing only the shadows of the doctrines, but this in itself is no slight thing. It is in fact just this inner consciousness of religious truth that one is aware of with most of our writers. They cannot run away from the shadow of faith.

Of one thing we may be certain—the imperative subjects of the Christian religion are bound to receive attention from English writers. They are, to say the least, inheritors from the sacred past. Religion is their most precious heirloom. It is always to be reckoned with. It is not in vain that the Bible and English literature have run a parallel course in English history for twelve hundred years. The palpable result is that the balance has been kept between faith and knowledge. The Bible as the monitor of faith has invited men to emphasize the unseen. Our writers have felt this, and have yielded to it in measurable ways. As a rule they may be reckoned among the friends of faith. Their attitude toward the spiritual verities of religion is at bottom not unfavorable. Tennyson voices the relative inferiority of knowledge to faith—

> "Let her know her place
> She is the second, not the first."

The above qualifying remarks must be kept in mind when we begin to examine English literature for traces of the separate doctrines of the Bible. For example, the doctrine of God. We should not expect

to find this doctrine transferred to the pages of imaginative literature in full and unbroken form after the manner of the creeds. The writer will almost of necessity leave his personal mark upon the doctrine. His own point of view will receive expression, his own manner of emphasis will obtain. Particularly if he be a poet, the doctrine of God is likely to be enveloped with feeling rather than with reason. Like the Apostle he knows whom he believes, and this though there be clouds and darkness round about Him. He feels too the ethical and spiritual import of what he believes. He may be—

"Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds."

All is not clear to him, but he finds his way nevertheless to the altar stairs that "slope through darkness up to God."

In reality it is the writer more than the theologian who brings out the riches of the idea of God. The fact that he is permitted to give imaginative treatment to the material of the Bible enables him to open up new vistas of thought, and to broaden the range and sweep of Biblical doctrine. We doubt if the indebtedness of the Church to literature in this respect has ever been adequately acknowledged. Too often orthodoxy is blinded to the value of those definitions and interpretations of Christian doctrine in literature which seem on the surface to be anti-creedal, but which in truth support the main contention. One can readily pick flaws in the manner in which the poets and other writers have stated their belief. But the main question is—are they not plainly aware of the Presence? It is indeed in the recognition of the divine

Presence that we discover the rich and varied service of literature. The poet never thinks of God as shut up within a realm of His own. He is immanent in all the life of man on this earth. He is so close to us that we dare not forget that He is here. As in Browning's words—"God renews His ancient rapture." Thus whatever departures from the creeds the poets may be guilty of, there is nearly always the saving clause of reality. It is not always the same—at least it is differently expressed. With Wordsworth it is—

> "A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused."

Less mystically Browning writes in "The Ring and the Book"—

> "I find first
> Writ down for every A B C of fact,
> In the beginning God made heaven and earth."

And in "Mr. Sludge, the Medium"—

> "We find great things are made of little things;
> And little things go lessening, till at last
> Comes God behind them."

But Browning is not always so practical in his doctrine of God. Like all the other poets he falls into the poetical idea of immanence—as in "Paracelsus"—

> "God dwells in all,
> From life's minute beginnings, up at last
> To man—the consummation of this scheme
> Of being, the completion of this sphere of life."

The poets not only teach us the presence of God, but they insist upon reverence and confidence—

"God's in His Heaven,
All's right with the world."

We have spoken of how the poets feel God rather than reason about Him. They know that He is, from the logic of their emotions. Thus Browning—

"The sense within me that I owe a debt
Convinces me that somewhere must be
Somebody waiting to have his due."

Tennyson makes his Arthur say in the "Idylls"

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not."

The poet is careful to point out the fault expressed in the last line. Not to find God in humanity, after having seen him in nature, is a tragic blunder. Literature has served us well in this particular—its very closeness to life makes it clamor for such an interpretation of God as brings Him into closest intimacy with humanity. Practically thus the poets have no difficulty with the Incarnation—they feel the need of Christ—

"He was there,
He himself with His human air."

The charge of pantheism against Tennyson is only valid when we forget that he is a poet and that he deals with the doctrine of God after the manner of a poet. "The Higher Pantheism" and "Flower in the Crannied Wall" have brought him under suspicion with many. But here as elsewhere Tennyson is but affirming the ineffable Presence—He may be other than we have supposed, but He is there!

"Is not the vision He? tho' He be not that which he seems?"

Tennyson never wrote more serviceable words—they have long proved a comfort to many souls, and have done not a little to reconcile faith and reason—than these—

"Speak to Him, thou, for He hears; and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing; and nearer than hands and feet."

After all is said we must confess that the poets have read deeply and on the whole wisely in the Word. There is much poetry of the Bible that presents views of the transcendence of God—witness the Book of Job. It is not strange that many writers have caught from the Scripture itself the lofty strain of an immanent Deity. Yet the poets also have many of them been ardent believers in the practical care of Providence. George Macdonald recites in verse the words of the Master—"Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father"—

"Therefore it is a blessed place,
And the sparrow in high grace."

No doctrine of the Scripture has received more ample recognition in literature than the doctrine of Sin and Punishment. Few texts of the Bible have been so frequently made the text of literary compositions as the words of the Apostle, "The wages of sin is death," and "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." From the psychologist all the way to the writer of fiction and the poet, the profound truth of these Scriptural affirmations receives frank recognition. Fiction especially must deal constantly

with the reality of sin. Certain schools of Realism in fiction have indeed exceeded the bounds of propriety in picturing the activities of sinful lives. Writers as a rule are not much concerned with any doctrine of the origin of sin. They are, however, profoundly interested in the nature and operation of sin. George Eliot is an excellent example of such literary interest. Her *Romola* is a theological brief in the guise of fiction on the subject of sin. Such phases of the operation of sin in human life as the seared conscience, the contagion of evil example, the cumulative force of evil, the insidious effect of evil inheritance, the sinister influence of evil surroundings, the deceptiveness of temptation, and the fascination of a life of indulgence, are as familiar in literature as they are in the pulpit. There are novels, like *The Scarlet Letter,* and *Adam Bede,* that preach more powerful sermons on the waste and sorrow of sin than any pulpit in the land. The indebtedness of writers to the Bible in dealing with such subjects is of course undeniable. No other book furnishes such vivid and impressive material on the subject of sin as the Bible. Nor is the material all in abstract form—most of it indeed is in the form of incident, illustration, example, history. Of late years it has become almost the habit of novelists to search the Scripture to find themes for story, novel and play.

Shakespeare's plays, as we have seen, draw heavily upon the Bible, in their teaching about human sin. Like many of the writers, Shakespeare is altogether orthodox in respect to the effect of sin on our nature. It is no mere defect, it is not the result of ignorance or of untoward circumstances—it is far deeper, a taint in the blood, a "stamp of nature."

Richard III confesses—

"I am in
So far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin."

Hamlet's words—

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all"—

contain an entire volume on the effect of sin in the moral history of mankind. The blindness of a nature that has grown used to sin finds expression in *Antony and Cleopatra*—

"When we in our viciousness grow hard,
(O misery on't!) the wise gods seal our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
Adore our errors, laugh at us while we strut
To our confusion."

The great English tragedies are with scarcely an exception profoundly Biblical in their doctrine of the nature and effect of sin. And as for the novelists, they have rendered a great service in showing us the exceeding sinfulness of sin. What theologian, for example, has done so well as Thackeray in exposing the ugliness of hypocrisy? Poets like Burns have given the world such lessons in the strictness and majesty of the moral law, and in the certain folly of playing with conscience, as can never be forgotten.

We must allude again to Tennyson, because he is foremost among our English poets in his account of the effect of sin upon human life. In "The Vision of Sin," "The Two Voices," and "The Palace of Art," the poet gives strong support to the Biblical ideas of sin and atonement. "The Idylls of the King" witness powerfully to the withering influence of sin upon

character. The confession of Lancelot—he who had a secret sin and therefore with all his native nobility could not see the Holy Grail—is a classic example of Scriptural teaching—

> "But in me lived a sin
> So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
> Noble and knightly in me twined and clung
> Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
> And poisonous grew together."

Contrast with the weakening effect of sin the transforming effect of a holy life as in the case of the maid, who like Moses did not know that her face shone, and that her eyes were full of the light of goodness—

> "Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
> Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
> Beautiful in the light of holiness."

Literature fails us often in its recognition of an adequate atonement. It sees the sin, but it does not always see the fulness of salvation. It recognizes the need of penitence, and even of atonement, but its method of atonement is too often far short of the Biblical measure. It 'sees the Christ stand,' but it does not grasp all the meaning of what he has done. The poets, for instance, do not hesitate to teach retribution for sin, but they fail often to point the way to the Cross. The writers see but broken lights of redemption. Nevertheless this partial testimony has value, and helps to build up the whole of a great truth. If Shakespeare pictures the goodness of Prospero leading men to repentance; if Victor Hugo, to take an example beyond the range of English literature, teaches that Jean Valjean discovers his own sinfulness

under the wonderful light of Bishop Bienvenu's goodness; if George Eliot in *Silas Marner* teaches the redemptive power of sacrificial service—we feel that these theories of repentance and atonement are only in part. Nevertheless they point unmistakably to a larger truth. What Dr. van Dyke says of this is very true—"No great writer represents the whole of Christianity in its application to life. But I think that almost every great writer, since the religion of Jesus touched the leading races, has helped to reveal some new aspect of its beauty, to make clear some new secret of its sweet reasonableness, or to enforce some new lesson of its power."

We cannot give space here to more than the briefest emphasis of the place which the doctrine of Immortality has commanded in English literature. On this subject the voices of literature have not been unanimous. We have thus the saddening lines of Swinburne, which cause the heart to sicken and the blood to run cold—

> "From too much love of living
> From hope and fear set free,
> We thank with brief thanksgiving
> Whatever gods may be,
> That no life lives forever;
> That dead men rise up never;
> That even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea."

But this agnostic attitude is not common with the poets. Almost universally they are buoyed and inspired by the hope of immortality. There is much that they do not see and understand, but for them as with

the majority of men instinct and feeling count heavily. Love bridges many a chasm. As with Browning—

> "Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God
> Must be ignored; love gains Him by first leap."

This leaping of the soul to God by means of feeling may be said to be at the heart of much belief in immortality. It is especially so with minds that are highly imaginative. Few writers of consequence in the development of English literature have not at some time faced the problem of the future. A cloud of witnesses in the literary world prove that on this subject men must lean heavily upon the Word, rather than upon their own understanding.

It is significant that two of the major poems in our language, Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," which Emerson described as "the high-water mark of poetry in the nineteenth century," and Tennyson's "In Memoriam," which has been called "the English classic on the love of immortality and the immortality of love"—it is significant that two such outstanding poems are devoted to the high subject of immortality. Tennyson reaches the climax of poetic confession when he says at the close of "The Holy Grail"—

> "In moments when he feels he cannot die,
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
> Who rose again."

Of these lines the poet himself declared that they are "the (spiritually) central lines in the 'Idylls.' The heart of it all is here—*that One who rose again.*"

There is yet another Scriptural doctrine which has been widely reflected in English literature—this is the doctrine of Prayer. The poets are naturally inclined to belief in prayer. There is indeed what may almost be described as a poetical element in prayer that fascinates sensitive minds. The thought of communion with the Unseen, of obtaining strength from invisible sources, of touching the intangible—is a thought which is native to the poetic temperament. The Christian doctrine of prayer is thus easily adaptable to the use of poetry.

It is interesting to note, how in the case of Tennyson, the various phases of prayer are brought out, not by way of analysis, but by way of unconscious adaptation.[1] Thus in "The Higher Pantheism" we hear the echo of many passages of the Scripture—

"Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet."

In "Enoch Arden," when the loneliness of exile in the island is almost unbearable, the poet describes the experience of the companionship and consolation of prayer in never-to-be-forgotten lines—

"Had not his poor heart
Spoken with that, which being everywhere
Lets none, who speaks with Him, seem alone,
Surely the man had died of solitude."

Again when Enoch Arden returns after years to find that his wife is wedded to another, it is only by prayer that he gains strength for the ordeal and power of resolution for the future—

[1] See *The Poetry of Tennyson,* Henry van Dyke, Chapter on "The Bible in Tennyson," p. 266.

"Uphold me, Father, in my loneliness
A little longer! aid me, give me strength
Not to tell her, never to let her know."

In another poem, "Harold," Tennyson states his conviction of the far reach of prayer—

"No help but prayer,
A breath that fleets beyond this iron world
And touches Him that made it."

Noblest of all his affirmations of the reality of prayer is that in which the naturalness of prayer and its power are the burden of his thought. The passage is in "The Passing of Arthur"—

"Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

One is reminded of what is said of the Patriarch Job —"And Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."

It has been given especially to the poets, with their imaginative gift and their power of applying truth to life in unexpected ways—a faculty which as Dean Stubbs says "has done far more for the average human will than the philosophic reason"—to interpret to us many of the finer and deeper meanings of prayer, and to help us in—

"prizing more than Plato things I learned
At the best Academe, a mother's knee."

XIX

BIBLICAL IDEALISM IN LITERATURE

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."
Authorized Version.

THE ultimate test of any literature lies in its power to awaken the mind and heart of man to great thoughts and important endeavors. Saint Simon, the French philosopher and socialist, had his valet awaken him in the morning with the words: "Remember, monsieur, that you have great things to accomplish." If literature cannot thus announce a new day of life and service to us, it has failed to attain the highest function of literature. It may inform and instruct, it may prove itself to be in many ways a literature of knowledge, but if it be not also a literature of power, calculated to stir the being of man with a new vision of life, it has fallen far short in its usefulness. It is literature, perhaps, but it is not creative literature. It does not permeate the deep places of life: it does not help to build the Temple of the Soul.

Judged in this way the Bible is preeminently a literature of power. It possesses the qualities that belong to creative literature. This is proved by the fact that the nations that have been brought most fully under its influence have not been able to remain still—the Bible would not permit them to stagnate. Where-

ever it has gone, it has produced a ferment of thought and action. It has so stormed the hearts of men with its ideals of life and destiny that they have been compelled to give up their passive attitudes and adopt Biblical views of aggression and service. As Dr. John A. Hutton says—"People who know the Bible, and have been moved by its great ideas of God, and of man, and of what God wants to make of man, will not consent for more than a time to conditions which depress and annul the surging response of their spirits to the invitation of life and faith." This alone is almost a sufficient proof of the profound inspiration that underlies the whole of Scripture—that it brings to men the most inspiring, most awakening message and program of life that they are privileged to know.

Thus, as Coleridge said, the Bible finds us at greater depths in our life than any other book. It is this creative quality of the Bible, this power to awaken and inspire, this control of thought and action, this faculty of lodging constructive elements in the soul—it is this spirit of the Bible entering into English literature, that has helped to make it the noble instrument that it is. We know of no better name for this profound contagion of power communicated to literature from the Bible than *Biblical Idealism*—by which we mean simply the pursuit of that which is ideal in life, the effort to define and attain certain noble objectives in the life plan. For the power of Holy Scripture lies not alone in the doctrines that it teaches—its ultimate power inheres in certain definite effects which are registered in the life plan. Such effects, it is natural to expect, would be apparent in the books that men write out of their hearts. We propose, in this final

chapter, to examine these vital effects of the sacred Book.

We meet at once in the Bible with an imperative demand for the *vision of the Unseen.* The contradiction in terms in no wise troubles us, for we are conscious that this appeal to us to open our eyes to that which really cannot be seen is in reality most reasonable. When we read, for example, what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says about Moses, that "he endured as seeing him who is invisible," we find an answering response in our own hearts. The testimony of our own experience is adequate here. The spirit within us is ever looking out of the windows to catch glimpses of the Unseen.

Now the strength of the appeal of the Scripture to the human soul begins just here—in its emphasis of the Invisible. One walks in the pathways of the Word of God in the presence of unseen realities. It is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible" who commands the worship of men; it is Christ "who is the image of the invisible God" who calls men to discipleship; it is "the invisible things of him since the creation of the world * * * even his everlasting power and divinity," that overshadow the minds of men. Throughout the Scripture there is ever a pressure of the Unseen, and therewith a demand for open-eyed vision of the Eternal.

Thus it is that they who read this sacred volume assiduously are brought under a kind of discipline of the Invisible. The Unseen enters, as it were, into the very fabric of their thought, it becomes part and parcel of their being, it affects profoundly the tone and temper of their life. That there is nothing unnatural

or artificial in this is clear, as we have said, because the heart of man is found to possess a desire, almost an appetite, for the Unseen. When this desire is truly satisfied, a deep peace comes in the soul. "Great peace have they which love thy law." Men wonder often how it is that the Bible so strangely soothes and quiets their troubled hearts. It is the companionship of invisible realities, the fulfilment of real desires of their own souls that they enjoy. With wise discrimination the Scripture itself speaks of this as "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." We do not mean to say that all Bible readers experience this quieting effect, but we do wish to affirm that the discipline of the Unseen which is furnished by the Word of God tends in the minds of men to produce the poise of those who know. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has this in mind when he says—"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." It is exactly this conviction or faith of the soul in the Unseen that is the formative principle of all Biblical teaching, and which constitutes the mighty grip of the Scripture upon the human mind.

What now do we find in literature that corresponds with this Biblical discipline of the soul in the vision of the Unseen? In what manner, in other words, does this formative principle of "conviction of things not seen" pass over into literature? The field of inquiry here is both broad and fascinating. We can only point out in a few words the impressive correspondence that exists.

What we find then is this—that literature reveals the same constant lift of the mind toward the Invisible. It practises in its own way the same discipline

of the Unseen, it summons men to the same tutelage of aspiration after that which can be grasped only by the finer faculties of the soul. It deals with things intangible yet how real and imperative. Its appeal is ever to the deep things in the mind, its intuitions, feelings, emotions, instincts. And ever it seeks to fix the mind upon a Higher Reality. This Higher Reality may be indefinite, and quite too impersonal, as it seems to us, nevertheless it is real. What we wish especially to make clear is that writers of imaginative literature are under the same spell of the Unseen as are prophet, psalmist and apostle. In the case of the Scripture it is the faculty of faith that is in use, in the case of literature it is the faculty of imagination. But between these two there exist a correspondence in nature and a coördination in service that are often unrealized. In both instances there is the discipline of the Unseen, the drift of souls upward toward an object of faith and hope. Thus the transcendentalism of literature, which frequently brings our writers under suspicion of unbelief, is in reality a projection of the operations of faith into the field of imagination. The tools of the writer are different, but they deal with the same substance of the Unseen, they seek to fashion in their own way the object of faith. Nor is literature lacking in the spirit of endurance and peace which grows under the discipline of the Unseen. Its summons to men is not divergent in spirit at least from that to which Moses responded when he "endured as seeing him who is invisible." We believe then that our English writers, emerging as they do from among generations of men whose minds have been steeped in that discipline of the Unseen which is inculcated by

the Bible, are for the most part promoters, whether consciously or unconsciously, through their imaginative creations in literature, of the Biblical idealism of faith.

Closely related to this discipline of the Unseen is another important element in what we have here called Biblical idealism. This is the profound *sense of awe* which is produced throughout the Bible, from the "In the beginning God" of Genesis to the "Amen" of Revelation. This sense of awe is the natural concomitant of the tutelage of the Invisible to which we have just referred. The shadow of the Ineffable Presence falls upon men whensoever they enter the precincts of the sacred volume. It is holy ground. It is needless to enlarge upon this characteristic effect of the Bible. The Revelation of John, if we mistake not, is less an apocalypse of the details of prophecy than an impressionistic unfolding, with many symbols and portents, of the glory of God, and of the exalted station of Jesus Christ, whose right it is to reign, because he was slain and has redeemed men to God by his blood.

It is important to notice, moreover, that this sense of awe in Scripture is accompanied by a corresponding impression of the *mysterious import of human life.* And it is this especially that literature seizes for its use in imaginative creations. To this effect of Biblical idealism in fact imaginative minds are acutely sensitive. They are aware of this Scriptural sense of awe and mystery in respect of nature and human life. An impression of sacredness rests upon them.

We may cite an incident of the Scripture to illustrate what we mean by the sense of awe and mystery.

When Moses saw an acacia bush flame out suddenly at his feet one day, as he led his flock along the slopes of the mountain, he turned aside to "see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." Thus there came upon the shepherd in the very midst of his ordinary toil a sudden realization of the awesomeness of the place. He knew without being told that the place whereon he stood was holy ground. There must also have come to his mind a new and unwonted feeling of the mystery and profound importance of life. Henceforth he could not be the same. From this experience in fact dates his call to the stupendous task that was before him. It was an impressive view of the mysterious sacredness of human life that had been given to him. He had seen the bush that was not consumed, he had looked with his eyes upon a symbol of Reality. The incident in its meaning helps us to understand the attitude of literature towards life, particularly as that attitude has been influenced by the Bible. Many of our writers have seen the Burning Bush, they are impressed alike with the awe and mystery of life. They are not indifferent to the sacredness of the ground on which they stand.

To this sense of Scriptural awe and mystery can be traced, as we believe, much of the sentiment of our English writers, especially our poets. How often we are conscious in our most reverent poets of the presence of a Biblical wonder. The mystery of life holds them, even transfigures them. There is a halo even about the commonplace. The soul most of all is touched with strange glory. Round about life, despite its problems and enigmas, is thrown a vast Protection. The Apostle Paul boldly made his appeal to the

identity of feeling between religion and literature, when he spoke to the men of Athens on Mars Hill of how men everywhere seek God—"if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being, *as certain even of your own poets have said*—

'For we are also his offspring' "[1]

With these expressions of mysterious import and grandeur in life we are familiar in literature everywhere. It is a feeling that is fed upon the Bible. If on the one hand life appears awed in the presence of so much that is mysterious, on the other hand it obtains sublimity through association with mystery. For the mystery does not strike coldness into the heart of life, it produces warmth. Men can pray even if they do not understand. They can walk by faith if not by sight. They can enjoy in their souls the comfort of a strength which poets, both sacred and common, are likely to define in terms of the Everlasting Arms. Literature like the Bible has this message for life—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

We take a further step in this study of the identity of forces when we note the element of *longing and passion* which are shared by the Bible and literature. As respects the Scripture we mean that spirit of eagerness for life which is everywhere apparent and which communicates itself to those who live within its pages. The effect of the Bible uniformly is to pro-

[1] Acts 17: 27, 28.

duce a certain ardor of life, a noble discontent of things as they are. It tends to awaken the faculties of the soul, and to set them in pursuit of high objectives. Life takes on new meaning under the training of this Book, which bids the soul build for itself more lordly mansions than before. We speak in these terms of the general effect of the Book upon men. One who reads it cannot remain still. His faculties are quickened, the emotions of his heart are stirred. Moreover—and this is the point of present emphasis—he finds within him a new sense of the worth of life, and therewith also he finds a strong desire to fulfil a new career for the soul. This experience of longing or aspiration in the Bible is not unlike the experience we have with other books, but in the case of the Bible we associate the experience with the soul's destiny, that is, with salvation. It seems to us as we read this Holy Book that we are receiving a message which is fraught with more than temporal meanings. In other words, we seem to discover through the Scripture the ultimate something of our soul's desire and longing. This we believe to be an important source of Biblical power, in that the Bible answers so satisfactorily the profound feelings of the soul. As we have remarked before, it is deep answering unto deep.

Now this power of longing in the Scripture is a contributing element in literature. In the case of English literature in particular we can trace to this source something of the fervor and passion of literary power. We mean, of course, the kind of passion that is associated with sober and exalted views of life. Under this discipline of longing or passionate desire for the best things to which the soul is entitled, life is no

longer a May day of pleasure, it is a battle-field, an arena, where the air is filled with calls to conflict.

Our best books, both in prose and poetry, are filled with this deep sense of passion for life, and we cannot but feel that the Bible has given character and direction to this force. Often it is a kind of "grim earnestness" such as we find in a writer like Carlyle. It is the old Puritan feeling alive and at work again. Life is a solemn enterprise. It has many enigmas, and much darkness, nevertheless there is an irresistible sense of *oughtness* beneath it. There is no evading of responsibility, no discharge in the warfare. The gage of battle is laid, and the soul will not flinch. This solemn bent of the mind to duty, this pressure of the life task, this feeling of *devoir* toward the Highest, is a characteristic Biblical strain of our literature.

Again the passion of literature may be seen in the form of frank and eager aspirations of the mind. It is what we describe usually as the inspirational quality in a thoroughly good book, the uplift of literature. It is the tone of optimism and buoyancy which identifies itself not merely with enjoyment but with genuine and serious purposes of life. Under this influence men come to feel more keenly the worth of living and experience a fresh joy in working. The burdensomeness of their tasks is lessened, the pressure of duty is relieved. Their spirits grow young and buoyant. We do not realize how far out into life the hopes of the Bible are flung. Biblical optimism is a literary asset that permeates wide areas of thought.

Or again the passion of literature identifies itself with some worthy human cause. The worth of life is associated with definite aims. It posits freedom, for

example, or brotherhood, or social reformation, or justice, or sacrifice in some one of many forms. The earnestness of literature is here seen in the light of intense moral purpose. Life must answer in terms of stern obligation. The old cry of the irresponsible—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—receives a mighty affirmative. Life takes on a conscious burden of service, and rejoices too in the privilege of doing so. It goes forth to explore with love and sympathy the dark precincts of the world, and is happy if it can bring home again anything that is lost. At this point we observe how the saving instincts of the Gospel emerge in literature. Many books have been written under the influence of the Bible that have served the purpose of "little Gospels," spreading the truth of salvation.

But the power of that which we have called Biblical idealism is deeper than the vision of the unseen, deeper than the sense of awe, deeper than the force of longing—it is also the *power of spiritual reverence.*

For one may be aware of the presence of the Unseen, may feel a sense of awe and mystery, may even be thrilled with strange longings of the soul, and yet may stop short of conscious worship. The Bible, however, does not tolerate this lack of spiritual thoroughness—it carries us on to the definite end of worship. How much of the Scripture is devoted to this aim we well know. The discipline of this Book tends constantly toward deliberate faith and conscious praise of the soul. It is impossible to read it and remain indifferent toward its supreme aim of a worshipful life. Reverence is its high law—even more, its pervasive atmosphere. It tends to promote in men a

spiritual frame of mind and to produce in them a positive tendency to a spiritual life. There is thus in and through the Scripture a spiritual *cultus* that is ever at work among those who frequent its pages. The extent to which this influence operates is altogether beyond calculation. We know this—that it works like leaven in the meal, like ozone in the atmosphere. If this influence of the culture power of the Bible were taken away, it is impossible to compute the spiritual loss the world would suffer.

Let us now contemplate for a moment the effect upon generations of readers of the English Bible of such a discipline in worship. We should expect that it would produce at least a tendency of the mind to reverence. We should suppose that it might even create to some extent an attitude of spirituality. This certainly is true in the world that has long been acquainted with the English Bible—a spiritual view of life is on the whole the prevailing view. There are vast unspiritual areas of life, and even massed forms of ignorance and unbelief—nevertheless we hold it to be true that the Bible has produced among multitudes of English-speaking people what may be called a Biblical, hence spiritual, point of view.

What reflection now do we find of the spiritual point of view in English literature? Is there any true "spirituality" of literature? Is there a spirit in literature that approaches at least the reality of Scriptural worship and praise? We are not now thinking, of course, of acknowledged Christian writers, who write out of the fulness of their devotion to Christian doctrine. There is a vast literature of worship of this character whose indebtedness to the Scripture is too

obvious to require mention here. We are thinking rather of those whose primary devotion is to literature and to literary methods. The spirituality of the Scripture we maintain is often very pronounced even in the case of writers who do not regard themselves as bound to specific doctrine.

There is everywhere, for example, in literature a prevailing spirit of wonder toward the facts of life. This state of mind is at least friendly to worship—it is often the very vestibule of worship. The note of praise is one of the truest notes of English poetry. The poets cannot refrain from voicing the thankfulness of the heart for the pervasive good of the world's life. If they are not actually found upon their knees in prayer and praise, they are at least not antagonistic to the spirit of reverence. They are not insenate to the universal call to worship. They are not indifferent to the deep sacredness of life. This sense of gracious wonder toward life we believe to be one of the sincerest elements in our English literature, and we believe further that its true source is the spirituality of the Bible.

A concrete illustration of this attitude of reverence in literature is seen in the view of the world and nature that is common among writers of our best literature, especially the poets. This attitude cannot be better described than as an Old Testament view of nature. The feeling of delight in nature, the attitude of tenderness and quiet satisfaction, the sense of eagerness and gladness, "the wild joy of living," the mood of open rejoicing in the "wonder and bloom of the world"—these phases of feeling that are so common in literature seem to have been long familiar to

us among the writers and poets of the Old Testament.

The spirituality of literature is more pronounced in its attitude toward the soul of man. The influence of Scriptural teaching is here very powerful. To the makers of sincere literature the soul is ever sacred and wonderful. There is a Biblical solemnity about the way in which our best writers deal with the career of souls in this world. The profound seriousness and honesty of English literature are in nothing so clearly pronounced as in the view taken of the majesty of the human spirit. In this absence of merely casual treatment of spiritual subjects, this lack of frivolity toward such solemn facts of life as faith and doubt, grief and pain, life and death, we trace the influence of the Scriptural discipline of reverence.

But we must go further. We find that the spirit of reverence inculcated by generations of Biblical influence produces in the most trustworthy areas of our English literature a conscious adoption of the friendship and support of a Higher Being. With the writers who have looked into the Face of the Eternal, through the pages of the Word of God, Love is the primal law of life, and nothing can shake its foundations. This creed of Love in literature is one of the surest and most lasting effects of Biblical idealism. The echoes of this creed are heard in many pages of our English poets, who have felt their way to the heart of Deity—

> "He trusted God was love indeed,
> And love creation's final law,
> Though nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shrieked against his creed."

The very agony and pain of life of which literature is so well aware does but send many sensitive hearts to the refuge of Love. The sacrificial element in the world's life may after all find its highest interpretation in the sacrifice of Calvary. Thus many writers, reflecting upon life, lead us back to Gethsemane and the Cross—that true and vital refuge for all suffering humanity. The poet finds Christ, if not through theology—through humanity.

There is one further element in Biblical idealism which obtains a positive reflection in literature. This is the ever-present *emphasis of Destiny.* The Bible never contemplates a stone wall—it postulates an open door, it affirms the right to a "projected efficiency," it assumes almost without argument the certainty of immortality. The answer to this Biblical emphasis of destiny is too prevalent in English literature to require demonstration. Our English writers, like the ealderman of King Edwin's day, are ever busy with the problem of the sparrow's flight. "The sparrow flies in at one door and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearth-fire, and then flying forth from the other, vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came." Is this all? No, this is not all. The Bible has a further answer, and its answer has been reflected far out into the world of literature.

Hence the prophetic element with which we are familiar in English literature, the impressive sense of a dawning Tomorrow that will be greater than Today. Our writers are not all believers in the doctrine of immortality. But few of them have been able to divest themselves of the command of the future. Some indeed, like Saul, are found among the prophets, how-

ever unwillingly. It is just this prophetic feeling or instinct for the future in literature, this Scriptural sensing of a greater and better day for humanity, that registers the irresistible effect of Biblical idealism. The early English welcomed the light of the Holy Scripture on this subject of destiny, and the bright shining of that light has never faded from English literature throughout more than a thousand years.

Printed in the United States of America

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